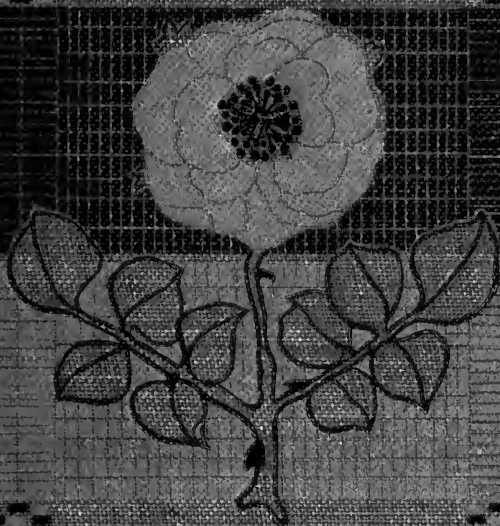


ON THE WE-A TRAIL



CAROLINE
BROWN

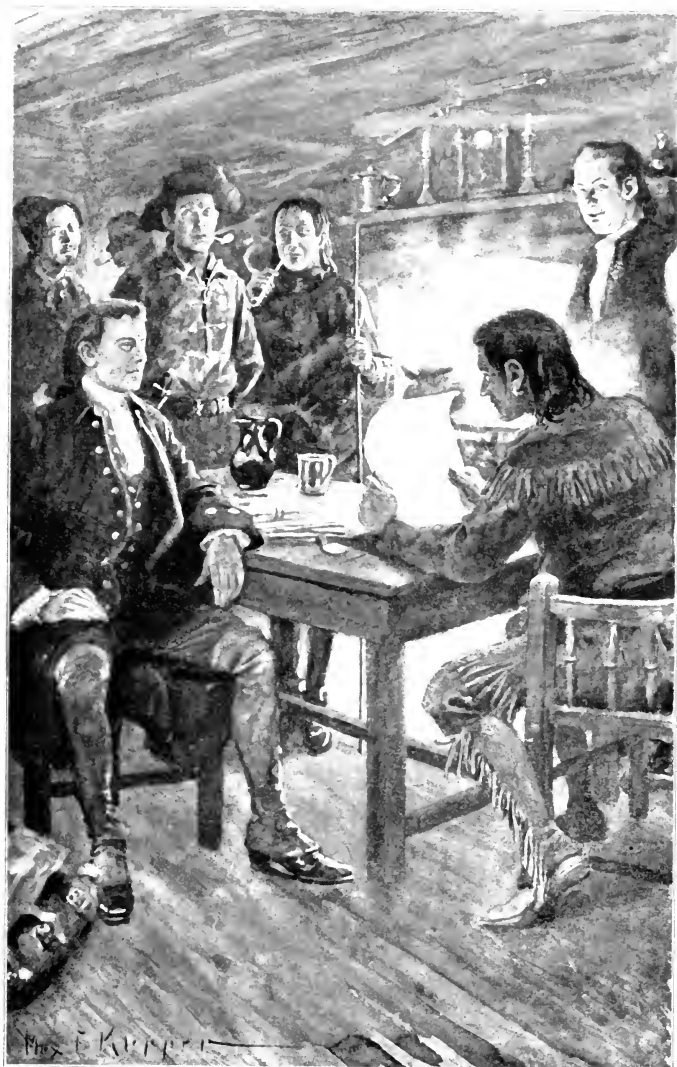
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ON THE WE-A TRAIL



““I would have you read this document.””

See page 226.

ON THE WE-A TRAIL

A STORY OF THE GREAT WILDERNESS

BY

CAROLINE BROWN

"'Tis Destiny, unshunnable, like death."

— SHAKESPEARE

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

BY MAX KLEPPER

NEW YORK
GROSSET & DUNLAP
PUBLISHERS

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Set up and electrotyped. Published September, 1903. Reprinted
May, 1906.

Norwood Press
J. S. Cushing & Co. — Berwick & Smith Co.
Norwood, Mass., U.S.A.

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Dedicated
to
The Sons and Daughters of the Revolution
The Colonial Dames
and
The Daughters of the American Revolution
Whose Fore-fathers and Fore-mothers
Were the Pioneers

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ON THE WE-A TRAIL

CHAPTER I

CHILDREN OF THE WILDERNESS

THE leaf-storm was ended. The sky was washed clear of every cloud and hung blue and brilliant above a little clearing in the Great Wilderness which the forest girdled with its primeval trees and bosage of yesterday. In this spot stood a small cabin. It was situated within gunshot of the puny stockade at the foot of the fall into which the creek at hand tumbled and foamed on its way to the great Ouibache, miles farther on toward the west. On this spring day the cabin door again stood wide, and framed in its vacancy was the figure of a young, slender girl not yet developed to the full contours of womanhood. She had paused on the threshold, with her face turned back over her shoulder, toward the interior of the room. Her voice — of that rare timbre, a combination of pleasant double tones — was raised loudly in talking to some one within.

“Yes, granny,” she said, as if in answer to a cautioning; “I’ll surely get it.”

"And dog's-bane, too, don't forget that!" quavered granny, in the uncertain volume of the deaf. "I'm poorly to-day. See my feet!"

The girl returned to her grandmother's side to look at the swollen members; smoothed the bandages on them gently, and said:—

"I'll get some 'white-man's-foot' too, it's big enough to use now, granny, and that will soothe them. Let me fill your pipe again, and then I'll go to the patch and gather the greens for dinner; the poke is up already."

Granny emptied the "dottle" into her palm, inured to the hot ash by long practice, and watched the girl with senile interest while she crumbled to powder the dry leaf of home-grown tobacco, and deftly whisked it into the pipebowl, making a dent in the middle with a slim brown finger for the embers on the old woman's hand. The pipe alight, the girl set off to the little field enclosed by tall pickets set side by side to keep out forest vermin—unconscionable robbers. Bordering this tiny plot, the poke-root grew in abundance; and its pale green spires, scarcely pricking through the brown mould, were eagerly eaten by the pioneers after the winter regimen of jerked venison and corn-pone.

The girl's quest soon brought her to the side

of the field nearest the forest. There was a rush and a scamper, and with a great bound over the palings a dog landed at her side; it greeted her noiselessly but with an extravagant grin of joy, with wrinkled muzzle and brown lips rolled back, displaying its strong young teeth; a gulping sound in its throat betrayed how hard it was not to give voice to the loud bay natural to its breed; but it had been trained to silence and well knew that one loud bark would carry far into the forest and bring the Indians upon them.

"Why, Juno, good girl, where's your master?" cried the maid, fondling the dog.

"Not far off, as you might guess, Ferriby," answered a bold, gay voice. With a scramble for the top and a spring down, a young man cleared the barrier that parted them. He was a tall, spare youth, clad in the deerskin breeches and jerkin worn by the frontiersmen. On his head was a coonskin cap darkly striped, with the tail hanging jauntily down behind. His feet were shod with buffalo-hide buskins such as the Indians wore in winter.

His face was one of striking beauty, and just now wore its finest look; for his black eyes were brilliant with a happy light and his red lips were curled in a smile; the color of his olive skin flushed

crimson, like the blush of a girl, through the tan of his cheek, at sight of the maid. His hair, with locks parted like Samson's, hung to his shoulders, straight, thick, and lustreless as dead coals, and showed deep blue shadows. It framed a thin, eager face, wherein were set eyes deep and dark, and so watchful as to be almost furtive in expression. His strong chin, a trifle too heavy, was relieved by "Apollo's cleft" down the middle. His lips, beautifully curved, yet almost too thin, made their line of junction sharply and firmly, as if at the very door of manhood he had learned over-early how hard a thing life is. An aquiline nose completed the harmony of his lineaments. Nature had sent him forth a perfect model of what her sons of the wilderness should be: slight of frame yet tough as a hickory sapling; lithe and active, cautious and fearless. He was master of every faculty, as those must be who dwell in the Great Wilderness where the crackle of a twig conveys a warning; the flutter of a leaf a message. He was pioneer first, and lover afterward. Despite the blush there was nothing humble in his bearing toward the girl. Manifestly Nature had brought these two together in her solitudes, as she had paired the birds now contentedly building.

"If you would only greet me as kindly as you

did my dog, I'd be a happy man, Ferriby!" cried the youth, boldly; "but since the log-rolling here in the winter I've scarcely had the chance to speak to you. Now you've got to hear me, willy-nilly!"

The girl was disconcerted at thus being taken unawares, and felt a sweet alarm; instinctively she knew him as a seeking lover, whom she had long shunned with the inscrutable coyness of maidenhood. She felt that now there was no escape. The eagerness of his ardent eyes, the triumph of his smile, betrayed his amorous intention. Bold and warm he was, and she shrank at his approach with a thrill of dread. Few words were needed between them, children of the wilderness, as they were, where silence has many tongues. With a quick movement he drew her to his breast in a close embrace and pressed passionate kisses on her quivering lips.

"Now, Ferriby Benhem, you are *my* sweetheart," he said imperiously; "and the first man that dares covet you will feel my fist! If that will not suffice him, then—" and he nodded meaningly toward his flint-lock rifle that leaned against the forest side of the pickets.

"You needn't make such wicked threats, Robert Lancaster; no one wants me but you!" she replied

with a sweet humility that conveyed to him her joy in that preference.

"What! not Ah-mah-nac-o, the Yellow Wolf? Hasn't he brought you presents of fur and feather lately?" he demanded teasingly.

"You know we must keep friendly with the wandering Miamis, Robert; and it is not kind in you to tease me about Ah-mah-nac-o. I dare not refuse his presents. He is in high favor with the tribe; to offend him is to offend them, as you well know. No; it isn't kind of you!" She flashed a vexed glance at him as she moved away a few steps and began to gather up the greens, which, with the basket, had fallen to the ground on the sudden embrace of her lover.

"I dare swear the very basket in your hand was a love-token from him!" cried Lancaster, roguishly.

Ferriby bit her lip to still its quivering, prophetic of an unwilling smile; for, in truth, the gaudily stained basket of birch splints had been one of the young warrior's offerings, which were varied and odd. Now and then he would bring her the gay feathers of the redbird, or the brush of a fox, or the wing of a wild turkey, or the earliest fuzzy catkins, the meaning of which the girl fully understood but dared give no sign.

“Ah, I thought so!” he said suspiciously, with that quick change of mood peculiar to young lovers. “You tell me one thing and do another! Did he give you the basket?” he insisted, as he saw Ferriby’s face change, hurt at his mistrust. But he thought her annoyed because found out!

“Yes; he brought it full of calamus-root and maple sugar to make a syrup for granny’s cough!” she explained so haltingly—shamed at Yellow Wolf’s fancy for her—that his suspicion flamed into anger.

“Granny, granny!” he laughed derisively; “catch an Indian buck looking at a toothless old dame when the ‘White Rose’ is by!”

“He brought them to me then!” she cried defiantly; “and what if he did? Didn’t I just tell you—” overcome by vexation she hid her face in her coarse, hempen apron to hide the tears of chagrin that sprang to her eyes.

Robert was pale with anger, into which most primal passion his untrained nature was easily apt to lapse, but her tears soon brought him to repentance. He was distressed at them, and felt as if he had wounded a brocket in the velvet, or had trod on a nest of leverets snugly hidden in mother’s fur.

He threw an arm about her shoulders, and

tried to draw her apron from her face, saying remorsefully, the while:—

“There, there, my girl! Don’t, *don’t* cry! I’m only a panther myself, and don’t know how to treat a fawn!”

When she thought him sufficiently repentant, she disclosed her face. Tender and moving it was! Her great blue eyes swam in tears, and a pair fell upon his hand. He felt as if seared by a branding-iron, and tenderly soothed her till a loud, dissonant sound roused them from their sweet forgetfulness.

“Oh, that’s granny blowing the horn. She needs me!” cried Ferriby, starting from his arms.

“It must be good-by, then, Ferriby; for in an hour I leave for Detroit, to barter off my winter peltry. I can get double prices there. The French traders offer me passage in their batteau, and it’s too good a chance to lose. I want to leave Juno with you!” As he spoke he drew from his doeskin pouch a length of leather string which he tied to the dog’s collar.

“When I come back, I’ll blaze the trees for our cabin; they shall be sweet maple, all the same size. And as soon as it’s built we’ll follow the We-a Trail to O Poste and be married by the Notary, there!”



“ ‘ There, there, my girl ! Don’t, don’t cry ! ’ ”



But this happy forecast did not cheer the girl.

"It is a long, dangerous journey to Detroit, Robert; I can't bear to let you go. Who knows that we'll ever meet again!" she cried sorrowfully.

They parted with many endearments and promises, but with heaviness of heart neither could hide from the other; for the trail of six hundred miles over prairies, through forests, by wild watercourses was hard and dangerous, and many never found their way back. Another loud blare, and they were compelled to part.

Robert watched Ferriby till she passed beyond the thicket of leafless paw-paws, — the unwilling dog dragging at her heels, her heart with her master, too, — then he leaped the pickets, secured his rifle, and disappeared into the forest.

Keen of ear and quick of eye as he was, the grief of parting had dulled his faculties, for he neither heard nor saw the crafty red-man who peered at him from behind a huge oak, circling the tree like a squirrel to keep him in sight. The savage grunted once, looked back toward the cabin, and said aloud: —

"The White Rose belongs to the son of the forest! Ah-mah-nac-o will find a way!"

And he followed Lancaster into the wilderness noiselessly as a dying wind.

CHAPTER II

WITHIN THE FOREST

LANCASTER hurried onward to the stockade, heedless of the noise he made. His feet bore his body onward swiftly, but his heart remained behind. So strong was his longing that he stopped short to cast backward one look in hope of seeing Ferriby again, if but for the briefest glimpse. There was an irrepressible movement somewhere near him, as if some inquisitive squirrel had leaped and set a limb vibrating, a fact his subconsciousness warned him of instantly and recalled his wandering mind to ever present danger. He cast a swift look around, and from behind a tree caught the glint of steel that a tiny sun-flash betrayed. Instinctively he swerved a little to one side, and a bright, new hatchet hurtled through the space where he had paused but an instant before.

“Ah, a savage! The hatchet is grounded, but not for peace!”

He coolly walked forward, and drew the instrument, meant for his death, from the earth where

it was embedded deeply, looked at it narrowly, and muttered: —

“New, and of English make! Then the rumors of the arming of the tribes are true!”

While he spoke a stealthy form was slipping from bush to bush, attempting to escape. This was what Lancaster had wished for, that he might give chase, which he instantly did, once convinced the savage was alone; and his lover's instinct told him who that was.

He began a wild race after the fugitive, and because of his superior length of limb and training as a schoolboy, he soon gained upon him.

The Indian once in plain view, his suspicion was confirmed. It was the Yellow Wolf! He had been spying on him and Ferriby; his savage jealousy had been roused, on which followed the desire for swift revenge. He would have murdered him. He deserved sharp punishment! This conclusion seemed to lend strength to Lancaster. His wild leaps lengthened; his speed increased, so that the space between the two diminished rapidly. In another moment he would have his hand on the miscreant's throat. He stretched it forth to clutch the fluttering fringes of his garments. On the instant, the savage squatted so that Robert was toppled head

over heels. Quick as a flash, before Ah-mah-nac-o could regain his feet, Lancaster rolled against him, threw him down, and locked him in an embrace that nearly snapped his ribs. In spite of the stoical endurance to which the savage had been bred, he could not subdue a stifled cry of acute pain; and he gasped for breath. Lancaster reached for his knife, tore it from its sheath, and thus disarmed him. He then arose, and dragged the savage upright. Though mad with rage, caution whispered that in this case murder might not be done upon a warrior of a tribe professedly at peace with the "Big Knives." He must take revenge in some other form — one that would be an indignity which the savage would deeply feel but never confess. Lancaster stepped back a pace from his adversary, and glared at him with as cruel a look as the savage's own. He doubled up his fists, and indicated to the red-man that he must fight as the white man fought. Ah-mah-nac-o regarded him with proud scorn. By a nod of the head he refused, and motioned to the knife at Lancaster's side, stuck there beside his own.

"There'll be no fight with these, you hound! You're not to be trusted! I honor you to fight you as a white man! — Ready!"

They flew at each other like two panthers. Lancaster had the advantage of training, the savage, of agility; so that many of Robert's blows fell foul, but enough landed to punish the Indian well.

They fought till their breath grew short, their chests heaved. Then Lancaster's superior strength began to tell. Ah-mah-nac-o sobbed for breath, a bloody foam rose to his lips; but he fought desperately on till there was hardly a spot on his naked shoulders that did not show a deeper tint than nature's copper hue. Suddenly Robert's arm shot out in a tremendous blow that sent him reeling. For an instant he lay like dead. Then he rose upon his elbow, and, through the red mist of hate which swam before his eyes, he gave to his foe such a look of malignity as might well make Robert fear some new treachery.

Lancaster held out a hand to help him, but the Indian disdained it and struggled to his feet alone. He pointed to the northwest, indicating that Yellow Wolf must follow the trail to the distant village on the Ouibache, on pain of further punishment. And the disarmed savage sullenly made off down the trail. In his wild passion of fighting Lancaster had not noticed his own wounds. He had not come off unscathed, for the savage had

torn his hands with cruel nails like sharp briers, and had bitten him like a wolf ; but he was none the worse for these, and he hastened to the stockade to join his fellows, for the long, long journey to Detroit.

CHAPTER III

IN THE CABIN

SEVERAL years before the advent of the Benham family, the little stockade had been built by the French traders and trappers from O Poste, and the freedom of the place was given to the friendly Piankeshaws, who had their village opposite Fort Sackville on the Ouibache. Here during the winter season, the harvest-time of the trapper, they lived in perfect amity.

When Lancaster, a high-mettled youth, moved by the spirit of the time, came among them, from the distant colony of Virginia, they unquestioningly gave him food and shelter, and later trained him in the hunter's and trapper's craft. When they returned to their homes in the village at the post on the Ouibache, the trapping season over, he remained alone in the little stockade; the spell of the wilderness had fallen upon him, and he could not leave it. One day, late in July, now two years past, he had discovered a small flatboat making way upstream, and was amazed to behold

upon it women and children as well as men. While isolated families were not unknown in the wilderness, they were rare; they usually dwelt nearer one or another of the posts invested by British soldiers. When the flatboat made a landing and all came ashore, glad of a roof's shelter for the night, and of a break on the terrible solitude of the abandoned river, Lancaster could hardly contain his joy. They were the first women he had seen in two years.

After carefully considering the advantages of the place, Benham decided to settle there, and the family had lived safely and happily, till at the end of the first year the mysterious "milk sickness" carried off the mother and two children. Another year had gone since then.

On the day that Robert and Ferriby parted in the clearing, the stockade would be deserted for the summer by the last trapper, who would scatter far and wide on their several errands to remain away till the next snow should call them back again.

When Ferriby reached the cabin, she found the patient granny fallen into senile slumber, and little Jack seated on the floor by her side playing, his pet 'possum cuddled on his frock asleep. The child was busily building a blockhouse,

breathlessly watching the structure grow higher, in pleasant dread lest each added cob would tumble the whole into a heap. Against the deep blue of his tow frock, his long, flaxen hair seemed almost as white as the ancient dame's time-bleached locks. His azure eyes were intent on his task, and he hardly raised them when Ferriby paused at the door. The 'possum roused when it scented the dog, and shambled off like a little bear to hide under the bed. Granny dozed on with many a guttural snore that waked her briefly; her shrivelled lips parted, then closed again with her sibilant breathing. Her abundant hair, divested of the customary cap, was as white as the wax berries that grew beside the door, from the morning's washing that Ferriby had given it. The girl lingered for a moment to watch the two, at the extremes of life, — age and infancy. She tied the dog to a peg outside the door, entered and crossed the room to deposit her greens on the puncheon table near the fireplace. In her passage she interrupted granny and the child in their dreaming and playing.

"See, sister," called out the boy, with a pretty air of protection; "I've built a great big blockhouse, and I won't let the Injuns get you and granny!"

"The Indians won't get us, Jack. They're

good Indians!" Ferriby replied; for she never encouraged the child to fear the savages who came to the cabin almost daily in the hunting season.

"Ah-mah-nac-o likes us, don't he, sister? He brings nice berries strung on grass, and pretty feathers, an' — an' — Don't he?"

At the name of the young warrior a look of irritation flitted over the young girl's face; for during the previous summer he had crossed her path at most unexpected times and in unlikely places, pressing trifling gifts upon her. Once she heard a faint fluting, and looked up to see Yellow Wolf piping on a rustic flute made from a tender twig of paw-paw. At first she accepted these odd tributes laughingly, but after a time they became painfully significant, and caused her great anxiety. When Lancaster returned from a trip to the Kentucky hunting-grounds, she ceased to laugh, for the savage showed his true nature by ugly scowls and fierce gestures, which Ferriby with womanly guile pretended not to comprehend. But Lancaster rashly flouted openly the devotion of the young warrior, and the two youths came to hate each other as heartily as if both were of the same race. The Yellow Wolf had shown his rending teeth till Ferriby was afraid for her lover. It was a great relief when he returned to O Poste

for the winter, and as spring advanced she dreaded each day to see his reappearance.

The fire was low; she threw cobs and chips on it, and set the dinner-pot, suspended from the crane, into loud bubbling, diffusing abroad a savory vapor. She washed the "greens," and added them to its contents; then she mixed the corn-bread, and turned it into the long-legged skillet, and set it on a pile of coals at one side of the hearth slowly to bake into the sweetest, toothsome morsel ever eaten by hungry hunter. She set the table neatly with burnished pewterware, and when her preparations were thus far completed, she stepped to the door, glanced skyward, and saw that the sun had reached mid-heaven, and then, that the slender sycamore in the doorway had all but swallowed up its own shadow, by which tokens she knew it was noon. She blew a blast on the cow-horn to warn her father of the dinner-hour. He was planting corn in one of the natural pastures, now turned into a field, which were often found in the heart of the forest.

"Granny, dear, watch the bread while I go to the spring. Don't let it burn. You know father hates the taste of scorched bread. By the time I'm back, he'll be here."

"He's here now," cried a loud, cheerful voice from outside, "and as hungry as a hunter. So hurry off, Ferriby!"

The girl tripped away down the path to the spring house, below the long, steep hill, Juno straining at her rope in vain effort to follow.

Benham rested his rifle against the cabin wall, took off his shot-pouch and powder-horn, and seated himself on the bench outside the door, threw his coonskin cap on the ground at his feet, and leaned restfully back against the logs. As he did so his vigilant eyes rested on the fringe of trees, impinging on the clearing, to the north.

"What have we here? Who are they?" he said aloud; and he peered steadily at the objects an untrained eye could not have discovered. Juno pointed, silent as a bronze figure.

"Indians! What tribe can they be? Not Piankeshaws, for they are at the shoals. They are in paint and feathers, too! What can that mean?"

A band of savages emerged from the forest, and came toward him in a long, single file.

CHAPTER IV

THE MEDICINE-MAN

As the Indians crossed the small space of cleared ground, between the forest and the cabin, Benham scanned them closely, and by certain small, infallible signs, he knew they were not altogether friendly, although they attempted to convey by gestures that their errand was a peaceful one. He suspected they were foraying out of their lawful hunting-grounds. He surmised that they were a war-party, as they were in fighting trim, in paint and feathers, and from their otter-skin belts dangled scalping-knives and bright, new tomahawks of steel. No friendly tribe went abroad thus equipped.

The warrior chief of the band stepped forward, and began speaking to Benham in a dialect that was unfamiliar to him; it was unlike either Mascoutin or Piankeshaw, which he understood sufficiently to grasp their meaning. But here was a language he did not comprehend at all, whose rough gutturals trailed off into soft sibilants.

Benham shook his head to signify that he did not understand him; and waved his hand toward the open door in invitation to enter. He bade them welcome, at a venture, in a few words of the Piankeshaw tongue, and raised his hands with the palms down to show that all he had was theirs.

Juno strained at the end of her tether, with bristling back, and quivering flank, showing her teeth, protesting against them with all her might.

The war chief, a magnificent son of the wilderness, began to speak, and to Benham's surprise the interpreter repeated it to him in the dialect he himself had just used.

"Vo-ka-nom-ik, the mighty war chief of the Puans, asks food, not for himself, whom the Great Spirit sustains with the breath of heaven he blows through the wilderness, but for these his children who are weak and faint with hunger. For many sets of sun we have journeyed from where the broad waters meet. We are people from the sunrise, and have followed the trail, finding no game; for the beasts of the forest fled before us in fear, and the wolf, hunger, gnaws, and we would eat!"

He accompanied this high-flown speech with such pertinent signs that Benham, well versed in the language of gesture, had no difficulty in understanding him. He motioned to the chief to enter

the house. An old, withered, pock-fretted medicine-man, who stood high among them, followed next (for they were as jealous of precedence as princes-royal), who chewed between his worn teeth a bit of "she-she-note" plant, a charm against the bite of rattlesnakes. The others followed in due order, but the humbler, younger members of the band squatted on their heels outside the cabin, and waited for the remnants like hungry dogs.

The savory contents of the dinner-pot were poured on the great trencher, and the chief dipped first into the scalding mass with his fingers, then the others likewise, all wincing with pain, but so ravenous as not to heed it. Granny looked on with the brief interest of age, while little Jack gazed with open mouth, dismayed at the disappearance of his dinner. He stood shyly at his father's elbow, his round eyes staring at the splendid chief, his long hair, silky and fine as thistle-down, making an auriolate around his tenderly tinted little face, in vivid contrast to the dark-hued savages.

With surprising haste they appeased a not inconsiderable appetite, when the lowlier savages were given the scanty remnants.

Ferriby had not yet returned from the spring

which tempted her to linger—so beautiful the spot, so fascinating the fair water. It was an ideal spot to think of her lover; and deep in dreams she lingered longer than she knew.

When Vo-ka-nom-ik and Mah-moust, the medicine-man, had finished their repast, the chief lighted his calumet of red pipe-stone, with its long, reed stem. Carved in high relief on its bowl was an antelope's head, the totem of his tribe. The chief gave one great puff, and the blue smoke rose in a gauzy veil about his painted features; then he passed the calumet to Benham, saying:—

“The Great Spirit once threw the blood of a captive maiden of our tribe upon the sun's rays. They fell far—upon her people, and led them to the spot where she was burned at the stake by our enemies, the Illinois. And, lo! the stones she stood upon were reddened with her blood. Of this stone the Puans ever since have made the calumet, and with none but brothers do they smoke it.”

He placed the long, reed stem in the hand of Benham, who gravely drew one whiff and handed it back to Vo-ka-nom-ik, who passed it on to Mah-moust, the medicine-man. As he drew the strong vapor of mingled willow bark and tobacco

his features were wreathed in so dense a cloud, that none could see the expression of devilish hate that agitated them for a moment. In passing back the pipe to the war chief, it fell and shivered to atoms.

Vo-ka-nom-ik gave a grunt, stepped back from his white brother, and bent a look of suspicion upon him; for had not the Great Spirit broken the sacred peace-pipe, and was it not a sign of his displeasure?

Granny, sitting near by, spoke quaveringly to her son, dispelling the portentous silence that followed the accident:—

“John, maybe the medicine-man can cure my feet. If I could only get round on them, then I could help Ferriby, poor girl!”

She stooped and unrolled the bandages from about them, removed the soothing plantain,—“white-man’s-foot,” as the Indians called it,—and revealed the members, ghastly white, swollen to bursting. Benham motioned to Mah-moust to look at them. The man looked down sullenly, then stooped over the old dame, who raised faded, trustful eyes to his cruel face, to see if she could gain anything of hope from it. His countenance was as stolid as the carven image on the pipe he had just now wilfully destroyed, the fragments of

which the little child was gleefully gathering up, his long locks sweeping the floor in stooping.

Mah-moust fumbled at his belt, uttered a great war-whoop, and before his intention could flash upon the brain, his hatchet came down with a frightful crash. There was a gleam of twirling knife-blade, and the old woman fell back dead, while her slayer held aloft a scalp-lock of long, silvery hair. His wild cry acted as a signal to those outside; there was a rush of feet, and Benham and the child were brained and scalped before they could realize the horror of their fate.

The flaxen locks of little Jack, dripping with his hot, young blood, were suspended from the belt of the warrior chief, who grunted with satisfaction as he stroked the soft strands, and said:—

“ Many presents great White Father give ! ”

CHAPTER V

AT THE SPRING

IN the pleasant privacy of the spring Ferriby was lulled into dreamy forgetfulness, lost in reminiscent revery of her lover. Suddenly the smile was frozen on her parted lips; her blood paused in its gleeful pulsing, and left her cheek as white as the clover abloom near by. Her eyes widened with terror. The tocsin of the wilderness had sounded, — the death-telling war-whoop.

For an instant she was incapable of motion; rousing herself, she crept noiselessly up the path, careful to disturb neither pebble nor twig. When within her own height of the top of the bluff, she paused, raised on tiptoe, and peered within the cabin. The sight she saw struck her motionless; choked her with horror, so she could not cry aloud. She strove to rush forward, but her limbs refused her bidding. Agony nearly burst her eyeballs, but no tear would come when she saw the gray scalp-lock flourished aloft exultantly. She heard and felt the crash of the

blows that ended her father's life, and the shrill scream of the little one cut through her heart like a stab. How long she stared in a coma of horror, she did not know, but at last Nature put into operation in her the first great law,—self-preservation. Driven, not by sentience, but by instinct, she retreated stealthily down the path to the creek, launched the bark canoe, and fled from the place of blood. Every stroke of the oar, so slow and difficult, seemed made by leaden arms. She despaired of reaching the stockade. At last she arrived—to find it deserted!

She knew water was the only trail that left no track to give clew to the subtle red-man, and again she set off in the frail little boat. Below the fall the creek flowed calmly between the walls of the great forest. She saw the startled deer leap into its depths at her approach; and wavering crinkles showed where the otter fled before her, the turtles dived in panic, a snake sunning slid into the water. Everything seemed possessed of fear and fled for life.

A dim design evolved itself from out her distraction. She would seek the friendly French in their village on the great Ouibache. All the streams emptied into it, and she knew the town

lay to the north forty miles away. She rowed on, helped by the current, now swift, now slowed by shallows, till she came to where the great We-a¹ Trail, which lead southward to the free hunting-grounds of the Kentucky country, and northward to the wide We-a plains, crossed the stream. She was appalled to see there an encampment of Indians. But they wore neither paint nor feathers, a token they were not a hostile party. The bucks were lolling at ease; the squaws were busied about the servile duties of the camp. Papposes were slung on saplings and swung idly in their little bark baskets. Before Ferriby could retreat behind the bend of the stream that had hidden her, the Indians discovered her, and gave a wild shout. One splendid, brawny youth beckoned for her to come to shore, but she only urged on the canoe faster. She could make no headway, for the water at the ford was shallow, or impeded by great boulder-stones, and thwarted her design.

At the young buck's discomfiture the others laughed aloud. Angered, he rushed into the water where it was waist-deep among the boulders, and with one hand drew the canoe after him to the shore. When Ferriby realized that

¹ Wē-ā.

the worst had befallen her, a merciful apathy came upon her,—the languor of complete exhaustion.

The exultant brave beckoned to his two young squaws to support her to the shade of an oak. She could feel the cold water they flung over her, and taste the hot liquor from the dinner-pot; they tried to force her to swallow. Her brain refused to take but the most confused cognizance when they bound her with bark ropes. She dimly heard guttural sounds; then silence. Nothingness!

CHAPTER VI

WITH THE SAVAGES

DURING Ferriby's stupor, the young hunters who had been sent out for game returned and reported to the chief that their most implacable foes, the Puans, were ravaging the wilderness. They, Piankeshaws, were cumbered with squaws and papposes on a peaceful hunting trip, and their only recourse was immediate flight. Ferriby roused to find the camp in commotion. The squaws were hastily lading ponies. Papposes were bound to their mother's backs. Everything portended fear and flight.

The squaws had hardly started on the northward trail which led to their village on the Ouibache, opposite Fort Sackville, when remote, stealthy sounds became audible; the crackling of a twig, the brushing by a shrub, warned of the approach of their enemy. The savages had not unbound Ferriby, leaving that for the last; and without waiting to do so they fled as noiselessly as a bevy of sere leaves before the wind.

When the young warrior, who had made Ferriby prisoner, got well within the screening of a hazel copse, he looked back, paused irresolutely, then with a grunt, expressive of some emotion, sent his hatchet flying through the space between them. Swift and sure it came, making the air whisper of its sinister purpose. The girl saw it, and her dull wits grasped the purport of its errand; she cringed instinctively, and the weapon buried its shining edge deep in the bole of the tree that sustained her, severing a tress of her hair. The shock of the impact, the horror of her narrow escape, prevented her from seeing what presaged far greater evil,—the hideous, painted band of savages, who now broke from covert. With yells and cries of rage they burst into the deserted camp. When they beheld the forlorn girl, they glared savagely, and one fierce, young warrior rushed upon her, brandishing a gleaming knife; but he was restrained by the stern command of the war chief. Vo-ka-nom-ik walked in a stately fashion toward her, followed closely by the medicine-man, Mah-moust. He uttered half-articulate sounds of satisfaction, and gathered together the severed lock of hair, which had fallen in burnished threads across her shoulder, and made it fast to his head-dress. Overstrained

to the last degree, Ferriby was seemingly as stolid as the savage himself. She had reached a state of physical and mental torpor, where nothing mattered. Her mood incensed the Indian, and he snatched from the belt of the medicine-man a long, white, dangling fringe, and flung it at her in a rage. Her eyes grew wild with terror. Her dull senses revived, and recalled the ghastly tragedy; she faintly moaned. No power remained in her to give other sign.

It was now nearly sunset. After unbinding their captive the Indians forced her to follow on foot, lead by a bark rope, like an animal. When she lagged, they lashed her smartly with tough whips of leatherwood. It happened that her guard, Te-te-box-ke (the Twisting Vine), was one of the younger braves in whom yet remained some sense of pity. He dropped to the end of the file, and when she stumbled, paused to give her a moment's rest; when faint, he fetched her a draught of water in a sweet, faint-scented, young sycamore leaf. After a march of many miles to the northward they reached their encampment.

Te-te-box-ke imperiously beckoned to a young squaw sitting within a lodge of green branches suckling her pappoose, regarding it with the

jealous fondness of a wild animal. She came obediently at his beck, like a well-trained dog, and shot a quick glance at his captive, and her face fell to a wayward and sullen look; for had she not been Te-te-box-ke's first squaw but twelve short moons? Already another!

"Te-te-box-ke wills that Mah-no lead to her wigwam the white maiden, Ken-che-se-way!"

Mah-no shot fiery glances at her master, which he did not see, for he was fingering enviously the long red-brown locks that fell to Ferriby's waist, one of which floated from the head-dress of the great chief Vo-ka-nom-ik, his father. As the long strands slipped through his fingers the girl cowered, and threw a look of appeal to the young squaw. It told plainly of dread and loathing for her lord, and did much to dispel the savage jealousy of Mah-no. She conducted Ferriby to her lodge where she made her fast, and left an old grandam to stand guard while she joined the other squaws that were busily preparing a great feast in honor of the braves who had come in with scalps.

Ferriby could lie at ease, and almost at once heavy slumber fell upon her. The old squaw sat upon the ground, and nodded and dozed, to wake again with starts; the pappoose sprawling



“He was fingering enviously the long red-brown locks.”

on a silky beaver skin, stared with beadlike eyes at the leaves fluttering in the gentle breeze.

The forest sank into silence. The dull sky, stained a faint primrose in the west, brought into high relief the small flame-lit circle. The warriors sprawled on the ground, or sat with their knees bunched, their slim hands clasped upon them, on the windward side of the fire, impassive and saturnine, smoking or drowsing. Now and then they sucked their lips when the veering wind brought a whiff of savory steam from the kettle.

Night prowlers lurked fascinated outside the radiant circle, peeping with glowing eyes from snug hiding-places. A squaw threw fresh fuel on the fire; instantly tranquillity departed. The ashes were knocked from pipes. The young braves stretched and grunted and leaped to their feet. The kettle was swung from the fire and set upon the ground. The hungry braves gathered round it, and fell to eating greedily, till appetites were sated.

The night air began to chill; moist breezes crept from the forest; the squaws piled logs on the heap of red embers, and around it basked the warriors, staring fixedly, dreaming dreams and seeing visions, till at last each form fell back

supinely in slumber. Then the humble squaws sought rest.

Ferriby roused with a great start, and almost shrieked aloud at a touch; but a small, firm hand crushed her lips against her teeth. In the gleam of the now westering moon she saw the young Indian girl, Mah-no, bending over her. Removing her hand, the squaw signed to her to rise, and with painful effort Ferriby accomplished it. Mah-no held in her hand a keen scalping-knife, which Ferriby saw with dull thankfulness; but the Indian girl shook her head, as if she read her thoughts, and cut the bark rope that bound her. She rubbed her chafed wrists and ankles with a soothing unguent, removed her worn moccasins, and replaced them with stout ones of buffalo hide. Bending her back, she motioned for her to mount. Wondering much, Ferriby did so, and clasped the squaw around the neck. Mah-no, used to burden-bearing, threaded her way with noiseless step, aloof from the sleeping warriors. One or two turned uneasily, but none awoke. Mah-no neither paused nor hesitated till she reached the stream, where she stepped into the chill water and waded some rods down it; then she set the dazed girl on her feet in the little river. She motioned with a

sweeping gesture to the northwest, and uttered softly the first words Ferriby had heard her speak : —

“Ouibache — O Poste.”

Dulness fell away as hope revived, and Ferriby comprehended that she was to follow the stream to the great river and from thence to the French settlement at O Poste. She, who a few moments before would have welcomed death, was now eager to live. She longed for the protection of the whites, and no hardship was too great to secure it, no chance too small to use, that might lead to it.

She pressed the little tinted hand fervently between hers. Mah-no's cold eyes softened ; she almost smiled ; she motioned to indicate haste, and glided away, leaving Ferriby to pursue her desolate way through the trackless water.

CHAPTER VII

WANDERING IN THE WILDERNESS

THE kindly clock-stars by their rising and setting told off the hours to the forlorn wanderer. The moon grew paler till it was but a wan spot in the blue overhead; the glory of night-light began to fade into colorlessness in the western sky. Slowly the misty dawn came through the gloomy forest. Cold dew dripped from the tips of the leaves. The birds chirped timidly at first, but as the sun flung aside the dull drapery of fog, they broke into brave rejoicing.

To Ferriby the hours of the night had seemed endless. She had followed the stream till her body was numbed by the chill water. Her wearied body pleaded for rest, and she clambered painfully up a steep bluffside to find sanctuary where the savage might not come. Halfway up its face she found a shallow cave, and before it sassafras and spicewood made a fragrant ambuscade. She crept into it, and threw herself down upon the dry leaves a beneficent wind had stored

there in readiness for some weary creature. Sleep fell upon her instantly, so deathlike as to hardly keep the creature animate. She slept and woke briefly, to slumber again the round of twenty-four hours. When she was thoroughly awake, Memory, refreshed, laid hold on her and tortured her anew. What was left to her in life? her kindred perished; her lover gone, perhaps slain on the trail by the same murderous band. All were swept away by a fearful stroke of Fate. Through these anguished reflections pierced the words of the squaw: "Ouibache — O Poste!" How could she hope to find it? Her wanderings had taken her miles to the northward; the very creek below her was unknown to her, but she knew that sooner or later all the streams in the wilderness, however devious, found the great river.

A sickening hunger prostrated her; all about her was food for bird and beast, but none for her. It was too soon for the wild strawberries, and the blackberries were but tangles of snowy bloom. Thirst parched her lips, and she descended to the stream to drink. She bathed her face and hands and swollen feet, and threaded her matted hair with her fingers to plait it into braids. Her form had changed none in the hours of her flight; but her face — what sad changes can befall the human

countenance in a short time from grief and terror? There was a look of old, hopeless sorrow upon it. Her smooth forehead was drawn to wrinkles between the arched brows; her eyes beneath were dark and dull with pain uneased by tears. Her lips had lost their charming curves, and were pressed together in a straight, faded line. Her cheeks had lost their bloom, and were as white as the rounds of elder blossoms, growing by the stream. Her step had lost its buoyancy, and she crept along with the feeble caution of age. Refreshed by the draught of water she took up the weary march and passed on into the rolling land when a sudden cry roused her to danger. It was the gobble of a wild turkey. She well knew that the savage decoyed his victim with this cry so lifelike as to deceive the very wood-rangers themselves. She plunged into the forest with frantic haste, and kept on till suddenly it came to an end. Before her lay a dazzling plain that stretched endlessly till it climbed afar to the very heavens. Visible loneliness! As she stared out upon the vast green prairie something strange happened to her. It was as if a great hand had blinded her and spun her swiftly round and round, as children play, then freed her, to find that she had lost all sense of direction. Desperate moment! She ad-

vanced a few steps in one direction only to retrace them. She hastened in another, to pause terrified. The loud beating of her heart, the humming in her ears, silenced other sounds. She sternly attempted to regain self-control and calm. Again she heard the wild turkey's cry. She turned to follow the sound, hoping to find its nest and in it food. She advanced but a few yards when she came upon what she had desperately feared to encounter,—a swarthy man. His head was reared above the tufts of long weeds which had hidden him. His rifle was aimed ready, as she came in range. Her last vestige of strength fled; she slipped to the ground lifelessly.

CHAPTER VIII

LE COUREUR DE BOIS

“By all the holy saints in heaven! what have we here?” cried the man, when he beheld a woman fall to the ground before his amazed eyes. His rifle slid from his hands; he leaped from covert to her side to see what manner of creature it might be. When he bent over her, his surprise knew no bounds. A girl, alone in the great wilderness, where, possibly, no being of her sex had trod before, in a spot to which he, familiar with its mazes, had never penetrated hitherto. He who knew the great woods and plains stretching from Omee to La Belle Rivière as few did. It was incredible!

“Oh! thou poor little one,” he cried with tender compassion as he looked into her wan young face; “it is well for thee thou fell at the feet of Hillaire St. Vrain, rude barbarian, coureur of the woods as he is, than before those two-legged red beasts that ravage the forest. For he has not

forgot what he once was, and, by the blood of his ancestors, will succor the weak."

He spoke aloud volubly in French — his own tongue — while he busied himself in trying to resuscitate the girl by every means he could recall. He even poured a few drops of brandy between her white lips; but the rigid muscles refused to swallow, and it dribbled from the corners of her mouth. He shook her gently at first, then smartly — to no purpose. Terror held her in a coma.

"Dieu des dieux! She will perish utterly here! Those beasts, those devilish beasts, they have driven her forth! Oh, poor White Dove! How young she is!"

He gently parted the lids of the closed eye and looked into the orb earnestly.

"Oh, blessed be the Good One, she lives! What now? The poor little one cannot remain here. But how to remove her?"

He pondered deeply while he gently stroked one of the girl's slim brown hands — scratched by briars, stung by nettles — with fingers as dark as if stained with walnut juice. He laid her hand down across her breast as we do those of the dead and looked at her wayworn feet, bruised and swollen, on which the ragged moccasins scarcely held

together, and at her gown torn by the clutching briars and slashing bush.

“Ah, heaven! the poor one has wandered far, and she has not eaten. No! Misérable! misérable!” and he gazed pitifully again into her sunken face, and let fall two large tears upon it, at which Ferriby stirred, then became motionless again.

But St. Vrain, the boldest coureur between Detroit and Kaskaskia, was not a man without resources; he had not ranged the forest for naught. He stripped a shrub of its tough bark, by means of which he slung his rifle across his back, first withdrawing the load. He then raised the girl in his arms so that her head fell inertly over his shoulder. He groaned sympathetically at the lightness of his load.

The coureur turned about and walked half a league within the thin fringe of the forest, pausing now and then to rest. He crossed a short arm of the great prairie, the magnitude of which had overwhelmed Ferriby, had smitten her with fear, and had mazed her senses. Before him lay the broad, brown sheet of the stately Ouibache. It was fringed along the margin with green willows and young sycamores, whose vernal leaves gave out a faint, sweet odor from their fuzzy under sides.

The banks of the river were shallow at this point and for the most part muddy, but here and there were patches of shingle. On one of these, sheltered by the long, drooping branches of a willow, he lay down his burden.

He drew from its hiding-place the smallest and frailest of birch-bark canoes. Its dark red tone showed it to be of winter-stripped bark, more highly valued than the light-hued summer bark. Its trim gunwales were of dark red aromatic cedar, and its long oar, which the coureur generally used, was of the same odorous wood. A pair of slight paddles lay in brackets on each side.

St. Vrain looked narrowly to see if the little boat's contents had been tampered with,— a small metal despatch box, which he had carried safely thus far from the governor at Detroit, down the Maumee, across the nine miles of portage at Ke-ki-on-ga, thence by the great Ouibache, passing in safety and without incident the Indian village Keth-tip-pe-ka-nunk and the We-a towns on his way to O Poste. The small remnant of the journey was comparatively safe. There were few unfriendly savages to molest if he kept to the great waterway till he reached Fort Sackville. Tempted by the prospect of finding game, he had

made landing at this spot, and had wandered on and on to the place where he had found Ferriby.

Now his fragile craft must bear an added burden, which, though slight, might well overtax its feeble strength, nicely calculated and suited to the coureur's purpose. It must be risked. It was the only means of rescue. How to accomplish this must be pondered well. At last he settled it to his satisfaction. His black brows unknit, his tightened lips relaxed pleasantly. He drew the canoe up on the shallow bank a little way. Then he lifted Ferriby and placed her gently in the bottom of the boat, leaving a tiny space at the stern in which to wedge himself. Over her face he laid twigs of sycamore, whose fanlike leaves made a grateful screen from the sun. When all was done he gazed at the motionless figure, sighed softly, pushed the craft gently into the water, and by a dexterous movement was aboard, while the little canoe dipped and danced perilously like a dry pod, for a moment, on the bosom of the broad river.

He dipped the long oar gently, as he stood upright, that no sprightly trick of the canoe should disturb the girl. Now he watched cautiously, where once he had been the most reckless of oarsmen, that not the smallest wavelet might

leap aboard to dampen her garments. From time to time he looked down at her anxiously; her silence was so like death.

"The tender one," he murmured softly; "it is but the kindness of le bon Dieu that keeps her senses sealed till she reach safety."

The coureur was wise in forest-lore, and knew that terror and exhaustion left a torpor like death, which shrouded the senses for days like a great obscuring cloud above an active volcano, and many times it never lifted.

They tranquilly progressed down-stream; for Ferriby's wanderings had taken her to the north of the village she sought: sometimes propelled by the oar through shallows so lifeless, the water scarcely bore along a leaf fallen from an overhanging willow; sometimes over chattering riffles.

At last, near sunset, the fluttering of a barred red and white flag came in view when they reached the outermost rim of a great bend in the river. An inward sweep of three miles brought the canoe under the northern blockhouse of a strong, well-built log fortress, a-top of which fluttered languidly the British ensign, and safety and help were at hand.

CHAPTER IX

LE DONNÉ

GASTON BEVARD was walking along the narrow foot-path, on top of the low river bank, which shelved gently to the water's edge. But he was not looking at the setting sun in his declining magnificence of gold and scarlet that stained the sky deeply, streamed far across the green plain athwart the river, and cast a transient glow on the eastern heavens.

Nor was his look consistent with his prior occupation, nor with his garb; for he had been conning a breviary, and he wore the gown of a *donné*. From one slender tinted hand dangled the beads he had been counting.

He was watching the play of a troop of Indian girls swimming near the west shore of the river, where the Piankeshaw village was situated. It lay opposite the old French post, St. Vincent, shortened by the villagers into O Poste, and thus commonly called by the French. To the right lay the fort, flaunting in French faces its hated

cross-bars, where a score of years ago had floated the lilies of France over this broad domain of the Illinois country, which had been cozened from them.

Bevard was a singular creature — the illicit offspring of an English officer and an Indian girl. Like many such he had fallen to the care of the Jesuit fathers, and as a “donné” was literally “given to the church,” to be devoted to her service — a matter in which he had no voice, a calling for which he had little aptitude. For such purpose he had been trained from the day his young mother drowned herself on the departure of the troop, and her consequent desertion. His tongue spoke French, but his soul was savage. The dark stain of his skin, the delicately curved nose, the straight black hair hanging on his shoulders, the lithe, slender figure, with its noiseless following feet that trod in a straight line; the striking light blue eye told unmistakably of the admixture of Indian and English blood. While his figure was slightly built, a certain squareness and breadth of jaw and chin and thickness of neck were had from his white ancestry. From his eyes shone the libertine passion of the white as he gazed on the innocent frolic of the red maidens. At the moment of his utmost

absorption when his cheek had reddened and his moist lips had fallen slightly apart, he was roused by a shout from up the river. At once he resumed his sedate pacing and fell to reading piously. Then rang out a second, more impatient call, and thrusting beads and book into his breast, he hastened to the river's brink.

At that moment a birch-bark canoe had run its slender nose aground. A man jumped quickly ashore, grasped it by the prow, and dragged it out of the water. Glancing upward he recognized the youth approaching rapidly.

"The devil! 'Tis surely one of his imps, or the evil bird that ever flutters about him!" exclaimed the oarsman. St. Vrain raised the green veiling from the face of his passenger. "It seems an omen of ill that that foul coward should be the first to see her," he muttered discontentedly. "My poor White One! Hilaire St. Vrain has his own sins, which the good God forgive," and he crossed himself piously, then started in surprise at the long-neglected act. "It must have been her, sweet saint, who brought me to do that," and he looked reverently on the still face.

Gaston was now within hail, and the coureur called:—

"Ho, there, Gaston! I would have your help. Does the good Father Gibault happen to be at O Poste this day?"

"Yes, he is even now in his cabinet in the cabin of Manette Taché."

The young man spoke in the pure, simple French the settlers at O Poste habitually used, interspersed with English military phrases. His shining eyes fastened upon the prostrate form in the little canoe.

"Up to your old tricks, eh, St. Vrain? You are a bold one to bring her here."

"Beast! Unclean pig!" raged the coureur.

"Ha! ha! A miracle! A coureur de bois turned virtuous. 'Tis as good as the devil filliping the blessed sign with holy water," and Bevard laughed mockingly.

"Thou priest's cub, lend a hand and cease thy vile clack! You, a servant of the holy church! Better join thy bastard kind across the river," and St. Vrain jerked a thumb contemptuously toward the Indian village.

A deep red ran swiftly over the donné's smooth brown cheeks, and wild hate flashed from his pale eyes, his lips curled savagely from his white teeth in ferine rage; he fumbled at his belt, but no knife was there. The coureur

on guard watched him coolly and laughed tauntingly.

"Not even a 'priest's cub' will take insult from the lowest of men—a coureur de bois, a wood ranger! Outcast! Vermin! Later you will settle with me. Keep thy squaw to thyself."

"Squaw! squaw! it is no squaw, as you could see had you not the evil eye that can only see in blackness. 'Tis a White Dove! an American!" Pity made him lose his anger, his voice softened, and he spoke more to himself than to Gaston.

"She would have perished miserably but for the good God directing my steps to her. More than that I know not."

His mood changed again when he looked up at Bevard's sneering face, and he said curtly:—

"Lay hold, there! Help me carry her to the good father. He will know what to do. Beast! Pig!" he wound up abruptly, as Gaston moved negligently off with a derisive laugh.

"Not I!" he flung over his shoulder. "A black buzzard may not company with a 'White Dove.' 'Tis against the purpose of the good God himself," and he sprang lightly up the bank, his scant student's robe scarcely giving

him room for his long, swift strides, as the coureur rushed upon him with doubled fists.

"It is strange," St. Vrain said to himself, "how I loathe yonder beast. Toad! Pig! Never do I meet him by chance but at once we fall a-quarrelling. Why, it would be hard to say."

His antagonism was that of an intrinsically fine nature toward an essentially coarse one, coupled with the instinctive aversion of the male for its illicit, outcast progeny; but the coureur was not well enough versed in the occult phases of human nature to know it. Of the gentle blood of the old noblesse of France, but of the gross, hard nurturing of the New World, he knew little of the fine spiritual unlikenesses of human character, which clash discordantly at contact. Strong and sturdy, fearless and intrepid, taking his pleasures none too delicately, like his kind, yet in his soul were stowed tender sensibilities he scarcely was aware of, and which his life was not calculated to awaken. This was almost the first exercise of that fine chivalry of his forebears, his by inheritance; and he was roused to a pitch of anger and disgust he had never before reached, to be thus vilely accused by one whom he thought all brute, that was not all hypocrite.

As he bent over Ferriby and wistfully looked

into her face, his throat swelled painfully, so that great tears were forced into his eyes, and he brushed them off without a particle of that shamefacedness one of another race would have shown at thus yielding to emotion.

"Thou poor, deserted, innocent one," he murmured pityingly.

At that moment a pirogue put into shore beneath the walls of the southern blockhouse, some distance below, and the solitary rower disembarked.

"For the love of the Virgin, lend a hand here!" called St. Vrain.

The man approached quickly, and when close enough for recognition, St. Vrain removed his gaudy wool cap with its quivering gold tassel, and made a courteous obeisance.

"Monsieur Vigo, how happy I am to behold you! See what Destiny has dropped before me."

Monsieur Vigo, a spouse of a few weeks, a widower of some years, looked timidly down upon the gentle freight of the canoe.

"A strange bestowal, I think. And of all men, on thee St. Vrain! The most reckless, daring, loose coureur in the great Northwest."

"Not as he is," said the coureur, answering the

last implication, nodding toward the fast disappearing *donné*;—"I have one little shred of decency and compassion left!"

A look of contempt crossed the swarthy face of the Sardinian. "God ever defend you from becoming such as he," said he with fervor. "But what's to be done with the maid?" he questioned. "I cannot take her to my bachelor quarters here, nor have you, St. Vrain, so much as a thatch to cover your head." His eye turned commiseratingly to the face of the girl.

"Monsieur, I had thought to bear her to Manette's. Yon talking beast has just told me that Father Gibault is now on his visitation to O Poste, and I would consult with him."

"'Tis surely a miracle. I would see him myself. I have but just arrived from Biloxi with news from France which I must impart to him straightway, and had thought to set out across the Drowned Lands for Kaskaskia on the morrow, after my business here was despatched. Yes, yes; that is the best thing to do. The good father will surely provide something for the poor little one. But what will you have of me?"

"If you will lend a hand, we will bear her in the canoe to Manette's house."

"It is a good thought," answered Vigo, and he

showed his willingness by at once laying hold on the end of the canoe nearest him. Thus it was that the whole village was startled at the spectacle of 'Sieur Vigo, and that most devil-may-care of all wood rangers, entering the house of Madame Taché, carrying a small birch-bark canoe between them, as gently, Manette said, as if it were filled with roc's eggs, to a chorus of shrill ejaculations and questions from that worthy dame peeping from her own door.

CHAPTER X

THE PRIEST'S GUEST

GOOD Father Gibault raised startled eyes from his plate, for he was at his frugal supper, a morsel of dried venison, a bit of bread, and a cup of native wine, which Manette had served to him, as it was now fully six o'clock in the evening. St. Vrain had thrown the door wide, without ceremony, and pushed through it with his strange cargo.

"At your old tricks, eh, my son?" the priest cried with an indulgent smile, for St. Vrain was as prankish as an ill-trained puppy. "You, too, Monsieur Vigo?" he continued, but with a change of tone from indulgence to surprise, as Vigo entered. "What have you here?"

"Father, we bring a poor forlorn one; barely escaped from the savages, we think."

Father Gibault arose hastily, and bent over the girl, examining her narrowly.

"I fear she's past shricing," he murmured.

Father Gibault had lived long enough in the Great Wilderness to know all its perils for the

hardy women who followed the fortunes of the frontiersmen. He knew of the dangers that menaced from the wild beasts of the forest; but held to be far worse, unspeakably more terrible, the tortures and outrages inflicted by savages. Here was but another victim added to the numberless slain. He lifted the tangled braid of soft brown hair, — expecting to find it matted with blood, — parted the pallid eyelids, and said: —

“No; she lives—an American who has escaped from the savages by the guidance of le bon Dieu. She has evidently not been in captivity long, if at all, for there are no marks of violence upon her.”

“None, father. When I found her she mistook me for a foul savage and fell all of a heap senseless. And thus she has been ever since.”

“It is not uncommon,” said the priest, “that such torpor follows on great terror or extreme fatigue. The good God sometimes orders it that the brain be sealed so that the tortures of memory may not sap the wearied body to death. If this brain were active, it could doubtless recall, and this tongue tell of horrors at which we strong men would blench. The merciful One will in good time remove this insensibility. And if never, His will be done, for it is righteous,”

The priest stepped to the door between the two rooms of the cabin and called: "Manette! Manette!" to the woman without.

"Yes," acquiesced Vigo to Father Gibault's former observation, "yes, I have seen cases like this among strong men after a long-forced march or a fierce engagement. But with such extreme delicacy of physique I fear—" and he shook his head doubtfully.

St. Vrain looked from one to the other, both of whom, it was evident, he considered superior beings. His face twitched with feeling: now blanching in pity, then clearing with hope, every emotion of his volatile nature passing over his visage like shadows across a mirror.

"For the love of the Holy Mother, don't tell me she will die," he faltered.

Gaston Bevard suddenly entered by the connecting door as he spoke. The coureur, true to his nature, found relief for his feelings in action, and fell to pacing the floor. As he neared the priest's pupil, Gaston observed sneeringly, aside:—

"Has not had reprisal yet? White maids are not such easy game as red, it would seem."

Low as the sneer was spoken, Father Gibault overheard it, looked at the youth sternly, and said bitterly:—

"Will you never be able to conquer the savage in you, Gaston? Go to the church and pray before the altar an hour that the good God will cleanse thy foul heart."

For an instant Gaston looked fierce and rebellious; but seeing no wavering of purpose in the priest's face, he turned and departed so swiftly his beads cracked loudly against the door-jamb.

"He is a born savage," observed Vigo, "despite his noble English blood. A pretty legacy the honorable captain left you, father."

"God's will be done. He has been my heavy cross these ten years. Alas! that I should forget that there was One who bore a heavier without a plaint," and he raised his crucifix and gazed remorsefully on the piteous image of the crucified One. "I sometimes fear that Gaston may be among the lost. But saved he shall be if the Holy Church can accomplish it," he concluded with unexpected energy, while the light of fanaticism leaped to his dark eyes, that died out the next moment before the gentle pity with which he regarded the girl, as his downcast glance fell upon her.

Just then Manette entered, fat and fussy, and broke into voluble chatter.

"And didst thou bring this little one, Hilaire?"

she asked of the coureur. "And where did you find her? And who may she be?" She stooped over her, then started back. "By all the Saints, she's dead! The pretty one is *dead!*" and she buried her face in her apron with loud moanings of pity, and rocked her huge bulk from side to side.

"Control thyself," said Father Gibault, sharply. "She is not dead, but will be if thy good offices be not brought into operation soon. Go, heat wine and milk, that we may give her a little nourishment. For I doubt not she is famished, and much of her condition is due to that."

They removed the girl to a low couch covered with fine skins, gifts to the father from the red converts who lived in the village opposite. This apartment in Manette's log house was always held in readiness for Father Gibault on his visitations, when he came a wearisome journey of two hundred miles from Kaskaskia, the seat of his charge which extended over the whole southern part of the Illinois country to the Ouibache.

Manette bustled about, elated with the importance of being the only one who could really minister to the girl, an unheeded tear sliding now and again over her red, globular cheek. She moved as heavily in her deer-hide moccasins as in

the thick wooden sabots of her native province of France, which she wore in the winter. Indeed, her whole habit was copied as nearly as possible from the one worn in her youth.

The French in the Great Wilderness had little or no commerce with the "Americans," as they were now being called, and their habits were not in the least influenced by them; they held to the customs of their ancestors.

Manette went to the kitchen and soon returned with hot milk and wine. But the priest would not permit her clumsy hand to mix and administer it. He took down from its place on an old mahogany chiffonnière an antique silver cup, and deftly commingled the posset in it, then motioned to St. Vrain to raise the supine head from the pillow. The bold, lawless coureur trembled, and colored through his thick tan, as he lifted the inert form in his arms, and pillowed the languid head upon his broad breast. Vigo, shrewd widower of middle age, could not forbear a smile at these signs of passionate youth when the very blood speaks. Nor could he help but feel again the thrill that had made his own form tingle in the embrace of his young bride, death-smitten, almost in the honeymoon, and his smile changed to a sigh.

The Jesuit, well schooled, saw nothing but a sacred chance for ministry, and with skilful, gentle hand introduced spoonfuls of the posset between the closed lips. Will was in abeyance, and without it the muscles refused their office. She could not swallow it. The good father pressed her nostrils tight between his thumb and finger. Instinctively she gasped, and a few drops of the liquid trickled down her throat, rousing her to open her eyes; but they were vacant and heavy with fatigue. She feebly swallowed two or three doses and lapsed again into slumber.

"It is sufficient," said Father Gibault, "she will recover. But we must be prepared for any course nature may take here," and he touched gently the broad forehead, pallid under its bands of roughened hair.

Manette had made haste to prepare the little cabinet back of her sitting room, which was kitchen as well, for the priest's guest. She announced all in readiness and St. Vrain and 'Sieur Vigo bestowed her on the high bed therein, and, for the time, left her to the doubtful care of Manette, who was rather more likely to kill her with much kindness than to cure her, so easily flurried, so maladroit was the bontée Taché.

On returning to the priest's apartment, Vigo said to him : —

“ I would like a few moments of private speech with you, father, if our friend here be not offended by this implied dismissal,” and he turned to St. Vrain with a courteous smile.

That creature of impulse started mightily, and exclaimed : —

“ By all the Saints ! I'd forgotten it.”

“ Forgotten what ? ” asked Vigo. “ To deliver the latest news from France ? ”

He questioned in so knowing a tone that the priest regarded Vigo steadfastly. But St. Vrain seemed to know nothing more than that he carried despatches which must be delivered to the commander at Fort Sackville, as, in truth, he did not. He never read them, even when they were unsealed, as once in a while it happened ; for it was too hard to decipher the crabbed writing. He took no personal interest in the war then raging on the seaboard between the colonists and the English. He was merely a bearer of despatches for the English, and was no more of a partisan than was a packhorse.

He made hasty adieux, telling the priest that, with his permission, he would come again on the

morrow to consult with him about the disposition of the stranger. Calling a couple of "panis"¹ to carry his canoe to the river, he hurried to the fort.

¹ Indian slave.

CHAPTER XI

IN THE GARDEN

No sooner had St. Vrain departed than Father Gibault observed to Vigo:—

“Would it not be better to talk apart in the garden? I fear not the whisperings of the trees and shrubs, but the woman —” a suggestive shrug filled out the pause more forcibly than words. Both laughed at the Adam-old slander implied, and walked toward the garden. It lay behind the house, and, to bar out intruders, was surrounded by a rough fence of wattles whose rusticity in summer would be hidden by wreathing vines of wild clematis and humble pea-vine, natives of the wilderness.

This garden was the delight of old Manette; on it she lavished the care of a *devotée*. Here, on serene summer days, Nature held revels. All day long the butterflies pitched gamesomely over it; the birds sang their sweetest above it; the ants built their tiny palaces in its paths; the moles dug tunnels under it and waylaid the

enemies of the flowers who worked mischief in the darkness. Here Aurora, with her sprightly lover Tithonus in her train, was announced at dawn by blasts from the fragile horns of the scarcely untwisted morning-glories in a strain so fine as to be inaudible to all but her chosen votaries. Their office done, they faded into nothingness before the painted ladies, who fluttered on their long green stems and danced with Zephyrus before her till the fervor of the Sun God reduced their silken robes to faded rags before the noon hour came. The deep-toned bees, high-voiced humming-birds, and shriller pitch of tiny insects formed a constant chorus. Violets stared like surprised children at their antics, and the homely gillyflowers looked on stiffly. Tall white lilies genuflected like pious maidens at the passage of these garden spirits. The rose, first favorite of Mother Nature, attended sedately from dawn through all the hours to burst into sweeter fragrance in the dim dewfall before she dropped to earth to be gathered up by old Taché and put to homely uses. Hollyhocks, like sturdy soldiers, stood sentry in a retired spot all day long, waiting patiently the coming of the four-o'clocks to tell them their hours of service neared the end. At sunset the

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sweet-breathed primrose, which had slept the hot hours through, opened languid eyes at the touch of the cool fingers of the dew, to take the night vigil. In the mists of the morning and the dews of the evening the clove pinks were the censer-swingers, flinging incense so sweet that the gaudy butterflies were enthralled into settling there longer than elsewhere; and by night dull-hued moths took their places. The great brown toad came at dusk to ward off destroyers from the spot, and fire-flies lit his way. Then came head-long bats. And the whirring ladybird unrolled her circling tongue to suck the drops of melligo left by her greedy brothers, the bees and humming-birds.

But this plot was not altogether devoted to flowers. The cool spring breeze brought to them the scent of thyme, parsley, sage, and rue, which furnished Manette her cherished kitchen bouquet, and gave a savory tincture to the "pot-au-feu." The greater part of the ground was laid off in squares with narrow paths between, in which were planted the homely vegetables, that would fill her dinner pot, all in good time. There was also a square planted in cherished cantaloups, from seeds brought from France.

The sun had departed for another day, but had

thrown on the horizon great, diverging, yellow shafts of light which fell far to the east and brightened the low-lying hills back of the common. Above sprang the tremendous vault so awesome to the solitary dwellers in the forest who see no more of it at a look than a patch as large as a man's hand through the latticed limbs of the trees. Little stars were lingeringly pointing the blue, and the lonely moon, now waning, shone with serene splendor. Some loitering swallows were uttering their rapid "tweet" in the joy of flight. Bats, made more awkward by their envy of the fleet swallow, dashed clumsily about. The ladybird's soft whirring fell pleasantly on the ear, from a bed of early violets over against the flaunting scentless tulips; for it was the last of May, and not many flowers were in bloom, since the earliest, scentless beauties of spring had departed.

The priest and 'Sieur Vigo paced the narrow paths slowly till they reached the limit of the garden. Both paused and listened. The lapsing of the river, the tinkle of the bell of a packhorse afar on the We-a Trail, the sharp barking of a playing dog, now and then a burst of song from the revellers in the tavern, where the villagers and chance coureurs were wont to congregate, to play at piquet with some favorite companion, or at

dicing, or at billiards (strangely enough this wilderness hostel possessed two tables which had been brought there on batteaux by the river), and they drank taffia, home-brewed beer, and native wine, becoming as drunken as if on rarer liquors.

“Je suis jeune et belle,
Je veux m’engage
Un amant fidèle.”

a mellow tenor, of great carrying power, was singing with spirit.

“Ah, St. Vrain, truly he is expeditious. One moment, tears dripping; the next, his sides splitting with laughter,” observed Vigo.

“Yes, yes,” said the priest; “but the lad is what he is, and his good blood tells, and at no time more strongly than in this, his last adventure. He has the heritage of a noble name. You know he is the third son of Le Comte de Boisvert. His elder brother is a favorite at the court of the king.”

The good father meant not the English George, — whom all French ignored as a monarch, in the Illinois country, — but the French Louis.

“Strange things come to pass in this New World,” observed Vigo.

“Yes, yes,” assented Father Gibault; “none

stranger than, that a scion of the noble house of Boisvert, whose sons took so glorious a part at Crécy, should now be a runner of errands for an English despot, his hereditary foe."

He took from the breast of his black robe a gold snuff-box, politely handed it to his guest, then he took a pinch himself, as a slight solace for so great a lapse of one of the noblesse from the traditions of his fathers. Changing the painful subject, he observed:—

"Monsieur Vigo, you may have weighty news to tell?"

"News! aye, that I have. News that will set that tyrant, Hamilton, by the ears. As you know, I am but come from Biloxi, and as luck would have it, while there, the *Antoinette* made port, bringing such tidings as must be whispered only on the wide prairie, lest it should carry too far. *It is rumored that France will soon acknowledge the independence of the Americans*, and a fleet will be sent to their aid. Since Burgoyne's defeat —"

The priest stopped him by an exclamation of surprise.

"What! Had not that news yet reached you? Yes, 'tis true. After four months' hard campaigning he surrendered to the Americans so long ago as last October."

"It augurs much," said the priest. "You know, since the revolt of the seaboard colonies, the messengers who cross the mountains with news and fall into the hands of the savages are destroyed. Perhaps it was thus we failed to hear of it. This espousal of the rebels' cause by France is likely to make great change in the fortunes of the Americans." He looked about cautiously, then, leaning toward Vigo, said in a vehement whisper: —

"I pray the good God may rid us of these wicked English heretics."

"Pigs — all of them!" said Vigo, scornfully; "but they have come to their sticking at last, I think."

"But these American rebels, the English tell us, they are more savage than the Indians; that they spare neither young nor old; scalp men, ravish women, and brain the babe at the breast."

"Lies! All lies!" cried Vigo, hotly. "I know them well, these hardy pioneers. They love liberty and justice, and for them will die. There is not a jot of truth in the base slander."

"I judge your news has not reached there," observed Father Gibault, pointing with one long finger toward the fort, whose flag could be seen flapping gently — a black blotch against the silvered sky.

"No; not yet."

"I think it wise not to be the first to proclaim it," observed the priest.

"My own thought, father," said Vigo, then he continued reluctantly; "for they are suspicious of you lately. Let it be a secret between us. It will reach them in due time."

Father Gibault smiled slightly, and Vigo resumed, "Now I must leave you, as I have business elsewhere."

"May I ask you to meet me here again in the morning, after early mass? I would consult you about the welfare of this maid."

Vigo assented, and with courteous adieux they parted — the gentleman of Sardinia and the gentleman of the wilderness: the one an opulent trader and one-time soldier; the other a poor priest; both men of kindest heart, finest humanity, and straightest walk in life.

CHAPTER XII

IN THE PIANKESHAW VILLAGE

ALL the known details of the finding of the maiden by the coureur convinced Vigo, shrewd pioneer and Indian trader as he was, that some unknown mischief of a serious nature was about to culminate, in which the savages were vitally concerned. The girl's comatose condition pointed convincingly toward two things: a terrible mental shock, and extreme physical exhaustion. He had roved the boundless wilderness through and traversed the broad prairies from end to end, in the Illinois country, voyaged her meandering streams from the portage at Omee to the fort at the falls of La Belle Rivière; from the mouth of the greater Mississippi to the great northern lakes. He knew the sturdy stock of the American pioneer, and he was convinced that no chance meeting with the savage had caused the horror under whose spell the girl lay.

He strongly suspected, nay, doubted not, that the English, defying all the laws of conventional

warfare and humanity, had secretly sent round the "bloody belt." Therefore, when he discovered that the Miamis and their implacable foes, the Puans, were marauding in the, to them, forbidden territory of the Illinois tribes, his surmise became a conviction.

The Piankeshaws, dwelling peacefully under the very shadow of the fort, may not have been attainted, as they were avowedly friendly to all whites, and thoroughly under the influence of the French.

To determine the truth or falsity of his conjecture, Vigo set out very early next morning for the village of the great chief, "Grand Door," ostensibly to bargain for peltry, ginseng, barks, or such small wares as the Indians bartered for his beads and trinkets. In going thither, Vigo passed the fort, and found it in that orderly confusion which marks the movement of troops. He soon learned that the commander, Lieutenant-governor Abbott, was just embarking for the long voyage to Detroit, recalled on important secret business. A fleet of batteaux lay ready, on one or two of which were mounted two small pieces of ordnance. English and Indians were busy lading these craft with supplies of all kinds. Their spirits were high. Coarse jests and laughter, though subdued,

sounded above the clash and clatter of arms. The soft lap, lap, of the descending water made a pleasant accompaniment to the chatter of the men; for Abbott was the sternest of martinets, and forbade all unnecessary bustle and noise.

Monsieur Vigo watched them till nearly all were away, then he approached the governor and asked genially: "How now, Monsieur Abbott. Are you off for a pleasure trip?"

"Yes," growled Abbott, "a pleasure trip that is likely to cost some one dear."

"Might a discreet man ask how far your Excellency is journeying?"

"Oh, to the seat of the territorial government, — Detroit."

"Ah! a goodly journey. I wish you bon voyage, monsieur," and Vigo lifted his hat politely, as the governor stepped aboard and the command "forward" was given. A gun in the fort boomed. They were off, and only a handful of English soldiers and Indians, under the command of a young lieutenant, were left to garrison Sackville, so great was their reliance on the neutrality of the French and their confidence in their savage allies.

Vigo watched the fleet fall into an orderly line, and saw the British ensign set afloat on the gov-

ernor's batteau. He gazed till all disappeared behind the great bend.

"The coureur's despatches must have been important," he said to himself. "'Tis likely our secret's out." He boarded his own craft, and a few skilful strokes sent it like a low-flying bird across the broad, murky channel to the western shore, above which lay the Piankeshaw village. It was on a flat plain which was reached by a shallow bank, so low as to furnish little protection from the floods which poured down the channel in the spring, not infrequently overflowing the prairie five miles westward. The river bank was set thick with a natural grove of willows that waved welcoming arms to the lightest breeze, or, in calm, fell into melancholy drooping. A stretch of native grass, darkly green as an overclouded sea, made a fine, thick sward between it and the village. Upon this level, set sparsely, were oak, sycamore, and wild cherry trees.

In common with the French and the Spanish, in whose army he had served, Vigo hated the English. More than all, he hated the name of Hamilton, the "Hair-buyer General," who from far Detroit ordered the destruction of the frontiersman, who gave no quarter, who felt no pity, who paid for the scalps of men, women, and children,

that the Indians fell upon stealthily and tortured in every horrible way that they could invent. So cold, so cruel, so implacable was he, that in time he became a horror to the very savage.

The French reduced to timid subjection, nominally neutral, hated, and feared, but could take no step against Hamilton beyond giving a boundless hospitality and tender ministry to any chance survivor. Secretly they adopted the pioneer's name for him, and called him the Hair-buyer General.

Pondering these things Vigo reached the outer lodges. The village was a goodly collection of bark huts, thatched with grass, with now and then a wigwam of skins. The most pretentious was the sachem's, which occupied the centre of the encampment. It was fairly neat and orderly; for association with the whites, such as this converted tribe enjoyed, could not but modify their savage habits, and they were perhaps the most civilized of all the tribes in the Illinois country, where the French wielded so kindly an influence.

The dying breakfast fires were now tiny hillocks of pale ashes. The women were busy at various menial tasks, while the men lounged in idleness, smoking. As Vigo strolled leisurely through these narrow lanes, he nodded sedately to the elderly men, and once or twice he took a

whiff from a pipe gravely offered him. But he asked no questions; for to have done so from the lesser warriors would have been detrimental to the business in hand, so jealous of authority was the great chief. Vigo had traded with the tribe for years, indeed, since the retirement of the last commandant at Fort St. Vincent, now Sackville. His tact, bonhomie, fairness, caused him to be trusted and respected by all.

As he neared the central lodge, where dwelt "Tobacco's Son," otherwise the "Grand Door," he espied in the distance a slender man, wrapped in a blanket, making his way with evident secrecy to some wigwam. His quick suspicions were aroused, and he stepped aside that he might not be seen by him. The young man gave a stealthy look around and disappeared into the lodge of Mous-wah, the old medicine-man, — a creature as withered as a mummy, and as soulless, — but not before Vigo recognized him as the priest's pupil.

"Ah, the wild blood calls to its own," mused Vigo. "The *donné*, what business has he with the medicine-man? I much mistrust that youth for something of a hypocrite, if nothing worse."

The lodge of Tobacco's Son was larger than those of the lesser warriors. Before the entrance hung a gaudy blanket which shut out curious

eyes. Within, the chief reclined at ease on the silky pelt of a half-grown buffalo calf, smoking beatifically a cunningly carven pipe of the sacred pipe-stone. When he detected strange footsteps approaching, which paused at his threshold, he rose to the full height of his magnificent stature, and called to the newcomer to enter,—an invitation at once accepted by Vigo,—and he again subsided to his couch.

The Grand Door was a handsome savage in the prime of young manhood. His succession to his father, Chief Tobacco, was recent, therefore he was the more exacting of every observance due his station. His features were finely aquiline, without excessive prominence of cheek-bone. His eyes were dark and bright with intelligence. His skin was clear, tinted, and fine, without a taint of alien blood. His straight black hair hung in parting locks about his shoulders, with his insignia of rank, a single eagle feather, thrust through it on the crown; for he wore no scalp-lock. His mouth closed firmly; but his thin lips were just now drawing the smoke through the long, feather-trimmed reed stem of his calumet. As June was young, the early mornings were chilly from the mists of the river, and he wore a shirt of velvety doeskin richly embroidered with

porcupine quills and beads. His leggings were of stouter buckskin, elaborately fringed and tagged with bright feathers. His shapely, slender feet were thrust into moccasins crusted with tiny shells and gaudy beads. He was entirely unarmed, for he and his tribe lived in almost brotherly amity with the French villagers, and had been converted to the Holy Church by Father Gibault himself. Yet he was wise enough to know that the English were in power, and to maintain a strict neutrality. His love and fealty were given to the French; his awe and obedience, to the English.

He received Vigo with every sign of pleasure. He gave him his hand, and called to a squaw, "Fetch a calumet for the white brother!"

Vigo was perfect master of the Shewanee language, a dialect of which the Piankeshaws spoke, and he entered into conversation with him after a draw or two of the pipe, while standing in the presence of the now half-reclining chief.

"Are the ears of Tobacco's Son, the noblest of all sons of the red-men, into whose hands the Great Father has committed the watch and ward of the Great Door of the Ouibache, open to the speech of the white brother?"

The Indian regarded him gravely and atten-

tively an instant, then nodded acquiescently ; but when Vigo would have proceeded, he waved his fine, slight hand to command silence. Again calling the squaw, he bade her — “Send to me Ah-mah-nac-o.”

She departed on the errand, but soon returned and said : —

“The ‘Yellow Wolf’ left the village before the morning star had risen, to hunt the great buffalo, on the Drowned Lands.”

The chief’s forehead drew into a wrinkle between the eyes—the sole expression of his displeasure.

“See you, then, Men-quat-we, that none lingers near, and keep you to the windward side.”

After the squaw had withdrawn he signified to Vigo to proceed, and motioned him to a seat at his side on the mat of rushes.

“Last night, O noble red brother, a coureur brought to Father Gibault a beautiful white maiden, whom he had found within calling distance of the We-a Trail. You know, O favorite son of the Great Spirit, that the American woman does not show fear on the approach of white men, nor in the presence of the friendly Piankeshaw. This fairest of maidens, white as winter snows on the prairies, with the gold of sun-flashes in April

showers in her hair, was bereft of all her senses, — she scarce drew breath; her very soul had seemingly flown to its most sacred retreat, nighest the Great Manitou. It was from terror, horrid fear, O great Tobacco's Son, that she had come to this. We have dwelt in peace these many years. The northern tribes were forbidden the hunting in the Illinois country. What does it mean, wisest of red-men, thou only canst tell thy trusting, dull white brother."

The chief was stolidly silent for a time. Turning his head from side to side, like a listening buck, then said in a tone as quiet as the downward fall of an owl's feather: —

"It means the Great Father from over the sea has sent around the bloody belt."

"I thought as much. Are you certain of this?" said Vigo, sharply, forgetting Indian amenities.

"Yes," said the Grand Door; "that renegade, Ah-mah-nac-o, came to my lodge last night when the clock stars told midnight, and warned me it was true. Indeed, he bore two belts, which he had from the Great Father's servant at Detroit, — one the bloody belt of war; the other the white belt of peace." He paused with face as impassive as the sandstone cliffs below the village.

Vigo gazed at him with nervously twitching lips, his deep-set black eyes eagerly questioning that blank, stony visage, as if he would read there, graven in minutest characters, his choice; but the sachem's tongue was silent.

Instead of speaking, the chief took from a leather pouch at hand a long belt woven of white shells and porcupine quills unstained by the fatal red.

Vigo seized his hand.

"O Tobacco's Son, thou art indeed a noble friend; a sachem who keeps his word to his white brother; thou art indeed a Christian." Making the sign of the cross, he raised his eyes heavenward. "May the true God keep you untainted, and the Saints invisible attend that you fall not. It means border war, then? The English, not satisfied by war with the colonies, would bring it to the very frontier, and exterminate by massacre the long-suffering, valiant pioneer in the Great Wilderness itself. Ah, God, how cruel is man!"

Both arose to their feet, and Vigo took from the pocket of his leather surtout a small package and pressed it into the hand of the chief—a packet of the finest tobacco to be had in New Orleans, and a small flask of the best French

brandy, so rare there as to be invaluable. For the first time the fixed visage of the chief relaxed into something like a smile as he took these, rarest and choicest of treasures and smelled at them with loud sniffing.

CHAPTER XIII

THE WARDSHIP

WHEN 'Sieur Vigo left the Indian village, he went at once to keep the appointment, made overnight, with Father Gibault. He found him pacing the garden paths with no sign of aught in his manner but gentle pleasure in his surroundings.

Father Gibault was scarcely middle-aged; but the privations, dangers, and sicknesses of frontier life, which had fallen abundantly to his lot during the last decade, had worn him so that he appeared well on in life, as he walked with eyes downcast and hands clasped behind him in serene meditation. But when those eyes were lifted, what a change! It was like flooding a dark house at black midnight with myriad wax-lights so brilliant a flame illumined them; his sweet, emaciated visage showed young vigor, passionate enthusiasm, fervent love, lit by their fire. At times a smile—charming as a child's morning smile to its mother—softened his lips

and attested to the beneficence of his heart toward all creatures. He was the sympathetic brother rather than the dominant priest in this wilderness of savages and reckless whites,—the harbinger proclaiming the coming of peace and humaneness. His figure was tall and meagre, which leanness his black soutane emphasized. His face was long and narrow, with a slightly prominent chin; a gentle mouth which closed firmly but without that severity at the line of junction so habitual to one of his calling. His eyes were set in deep hollows under a brow that was high and narrow; hollows were in his cheeks as well, and at his temples. His nose was long, delicately thin and curved. His small head was fringed with sparse black hair in the midst of which the tonsure glistened like ivory, the tint of his skin. While his manner entirely lacked Gallic vivacity, it had but a hint of that aloofness from his kind bred by his calling. Force he never used; finesse of the finest, gentleness of the blindest quality were the means he employed to win men. All respected, loved, and appealed to him for help and guidance, which he never withheld from believer or heretic.

As Vigo approached down the allée between the beds, laid out in the fashion of France, square

and trim, Father Gibault paused until he joined him, and together they walked to the bottom of the garden, where a seat encircling a sycamore, a stray from the bottom-glades, furnished them a resting-place.

When they were seated, 'Sieur Vigo waited respectfully for Father Gibault to speak. A true lover of Nature sits silent while she unfolds her old, but ever new, mysteries, — the opening flower, the evaporating dew, the rousing of her humble creatures; and the priest — a lover solely hers — sat speechless, engrossed with the modest beauty of the spot. After a few moments' contemplation, he roused and said: —

“Monsieur Vigo, I would consult with you about the young maid who was brought to us last night, so evidently God-given. I know you to be a man of honor and good heart, and I would have you advise with me.”

“You know, father, it was wholly by accident that I met St. Vrain at the landing, and I really had no part in the matter save to help carry the girl to your door. Is not the coureur the man who rightfully should be consulted?”

“A coureur, monsieur, consulted on such a delicate question! No, no!”

“But St. Vrain can be trusted to act honorably

in such a case, I think, mon père, wild, reckless fellow as he is!"

"It might be well to do him this act of courtesy, — consult him, — and let him feel responsibility in so great a matter," answered the priest, reflectively.

"How is the maid this morning?" asked Vigo.

"She has never roused the whole night through, so Manette informs me."

"I have seen strong men affected similarly, who, after complete rest, were fully restored."

"True! but with this sensitive organism beneath," said the priest, tapping his forehead, "I fear all is not right, — a something terror caused, not mere fatigue."

"You are only too right in your conjecture; the cursed English have sent round the bloody belt. Even to the village over yonder! Evidently St. Vrain's despatches, which he delivered last night, bore on that devilish business. I doubt it not! As I came up the Ouibache I heard that the Miamis and Puans had been harrying the settlers between here and the Great Falls!"

"Alas! alas!" groaned the priest, "that means bloody massacre! I may be able to restrain my own tribes, but these outer barbarians, — what can I do with them? The emissary must have

arrived very recently, for I have been here two days myself, and have heard nothing of it."

"I strongly suspect the emissary to be that renegade Ah-mah-nac-o, from a hint dropped unintentionally by the Grand Door himself."

"I had hoped to set out for Kaskaskia to-day, but this matter must be looked into. I must speak to Tobacco's Son. Then, too, I must see this young maid placed in a suitable home, which I have reason to hope will be thrown open to her, the first victim of this horrible brutality, I doubt not. Do you know what answer the chief made to the British agent? "

"He chose the white belt," said Vigo, impressively.

"Blessed be God!" cried the priest, fervently.

Vigo related to him the particulars of his morning visit to the village.

"It was a sad day—that when King Louis resigned the Illinois country, the rightful domain of the French, to their hereditary foes, the British," said Vigo, bitterly.

"True, my son. But that can never be altered. It can only be borne with patience," Father Gibault forbearingly replied.

"But, father, may not 'patience' be carried too far?"

"There speaks the soldier. Never, my son. It was by patience that the sons of Loyola pushed through the pathless forests, from one end of the Great Wilderness to the other, and bore the cross to the savage. It is through perfect patience we look for perfect reward."

Vigo said no more, but abruptly changed the subject to the girl again.

"You said, father, that you had been planning for the girl — what have you fixed upon?"

"I arranged with Colonel Dubois and his wife, last night, to take her into their family. The presence of other young people, like his three demoiselles, will hearten her, when she comes to herself, more than could Manette. Moreover, from her appearance, I think the maid one who would need gentler nurture, more refined associates, than the good Taché could furnish her. Does it meet your approval?"

"A most happy solution of the problem, father. None but you could so felicitously have done it," said Vigo, heartily. "When will you place her in their care?"

"I think it best to remove her before she comes to herself, and am even now awaiting the colonel's *calèche*."

As he spoke, the sound of crunching and

squeaking was heard. The expected vehicle drew up in front of Manette's house, which abutted the roadway, with only a narrow foot-path between it and the wagon track.

Father Gibault and 'Sieur Vigo hastily left the garden, to greet the colonel, who had accompanied the conveyance himself, attended by two Panis, one of whom led the fiery Spanish horse that restively tossed its head and pawed with impatient feet, sending abroad showers of sandy loam. The calèche was a two-wheeled affair, the wheels being mere disks cut from a log; the bed was a raised platform with side-boards kept in place by wooden pins; but it was made comfortable for the girl's removal by a lining of buffalo pelts and pillows.

While they were examining these arrangements, St. Vrain hurriedly appeared. He greeted all respectfully, but without a trace of servility; he seemed to recognize in them only the superiority of years. He looked fresh and buoyant, notwithstanding he had spent the greater part of the night at the tavern, dicing, playing billiards, singing songs none too delicate, and drinking taffia in astonishing quantities. As he said, it took a good deal to lay him on the carpet.

"Good day, gentlemen, all!" he cried with loud

cheerfulness; for a coureur either bawled like a buffalo-bull or whispered like the pines. "How do you find yourself, mon père? and the poor little one, how goes it with her?"

"With me it goes well," answered the priest gently. "But alas, for the poor maid! There is no change for the better. Your coming now, Hilaire, is a happy chance. Monsieur Dubois and I sought to speak with you last night, but my messenger could not find you."

St. Vrain had the grace to look ashamed, but he made no explanation; he only said: "Well, father, I am here now! What may it be that you would consult me about?"

"As it was altogether owing to your courage and good heart that the maid was brought here, and her life saved, it is only right that you should be consulted as to her future, and share our wardship. Colonel Dubois as commandant of the village has the right legally; I have it by the authority of the Holy Church; you, by the right of the finder."

The bold ranger looked almost frightened, and stammered hastily:—

"I a guardian to a young girl! Monsieur, it cannot be! I am not fit—I mean—I know nothing about girls!" with a gesture of repudia-

tion, and an expression of ludicrous dread of the responsibility. He cried forcibly: "I leave it all to you, gentlemen. I resign all authority on the spot!" stamping energetically, as if to mark it.

His hearers could hardly restrain a smile at his panic. In truth wardship was rather an inappropriate office to his years, for he was not above six and twenty.

"As you will!" said Father Gibault. "Colonel Dubois and I will assume entire charge of the maid, since both you and 'Sieur Vigo decline. But you may be of assistance now in removing her to the colonel's house."

The men followed the priest into the house, and soon came out again carrying Ferriby in a gaudy patchwork quilt, a man at each corner. Madame Taché followed, gabbling incessantly, and when the cart started she shaded her eyes with one hand, a tear overflowing from each, and said, looking after it as it moved off slowly, —

"But it was poor Taché who took her in first, and she will never know!"

As St. Vrain and Vigo walked away to the tavern, the latter said to the coureur: "You had words with the priest's pupil last night?"

"Yes; he's such easy game! So hot a fool!"

Vigo smiled, and thought the truth were the other way, but he only remarked: —

“I warn you! I saw him over in the village at daybreak this morning, entering the lodge of Nah-moust, the medicine-man. Then, too, I saw him last night with Ah-mah-nac-o. Beware, thou, of both!”

“One at a time I fear them not! Together, the devil himself might blench, but” — vauntingly, “not the coureur St. Vrain!” and he laughed loudly.

CHAPTER XIV

THE NEW HOME

THE fort and little church occupied the centre of the village of one street, which straggled along the water front for perhaps a mile; there were also several cross lanes. Colonel Dubois's house was situated a quarter of a mile north of the fort, far from the lowlands to the south. It stood well back from the river, yet faced the great waterway. The grounds to the rear ran back to the commons, a great glebe of many hundred acres, enclosed with palings of split saplings to the height of ten feet, over which neither beast nor savage might easily climb. It was the common pasture ground for the entire populace, who shut up their cattle and left their fields open.

The house itself was the most pretentious in the village, two full stories in height, built of the native rough stone, with a clapboard roof, from which peeped two dormer windows toward the west, and two toward the east, lighting the garret. It had been completed about five years, and it

had taken as many to get together the building materials, brought as they were by batteaux from New Orleans.

The Dubois family had taken up residence at O Poste when the present head of the house was a youth of twenty. His father Toussaint Dubois, a man of gentle birth and breeding, was commandant of Post St. Vincent under the French king Louis. Dubois the elder, mortified at the British acquisition of the territory, died of a stroke. François, the son, remained at the Post where they had acquired much land and little money, and took up the headship of the family. He quickly married off his three sisters; for maids were scarce and men plentiful. This duty done, he himself looked about for a wife, and wedded Rosalie Bouché, the daughter of the richest trader at Kaskaskia. The Bouchés were once clog-wearing peasants in Normandy, while the Dubois were of the noblesse. But what matter in a new country when the "dot" is large? The Bouchés had joined the exodus to New France and had followed the trail of the French explorers farther south till they had stranded in the Illinois country. The Dubois had been sent to govern them. Destiny had united them, bourgeois and noblesse, and filled the scanty purse of the latter,

as often happens. Just how wandering human atomies take root after floating hither and yon, idly as thistle-down, guided only by a vagrant breeze, then in a moment of stagnant wind drop to become rooted in the most unlikely place before they are aware, no one knows.

Such was the village of O Poste in 1778,—a rooting of roving humanity; a community numbering nearly six hundred souls, made up of waifs and strays from the great world; French traders, voyageurs, trappers, Indian converts, panis (or captured Indian slaves), a few blacks, and a handful of American pioneers from the Virginia and Kentucky countries—more restless than the wolves of the forest!

In the course of half a century the village had grown from a settlement of bark lodges and tepees to a town of comfortable log-cabins and a few pretentious stone houses. On the occupancy of the British the name of the fort had been changed from St. Vincent to Sackville. It had been enlarged, its palisades strengthened, and each of its four blockhouses provided with sufficient armament for the time.

Colonel Dubois's house was the mansion of the village. It was of stone, and a little portico shaded the front door, over which vines

from the forest clambered, making it a veritable bower.

A large hall, with a door at either end opening to the outer world, ran through the centre of the edifice. A huge fireplace was on one side and the stairway ascended the other. At either hand were two large apartments; the *grande chambre*, or parlor; behind it a cabinet, or guest-chamber. Opposite these were a general sitting room and the *salle à manger*, or dining room. The upper floor was similarly divided into four sleeping apartments.

Two years before Colonel Dubois had taken his family on a grand voyage to New Orleans, when the fleet of *batteaux* had carried down a cargo of deer-hides, peltries, bear oil, roots, and barks to trade for domestic wares. Then for the first time the young demoiselles — even madame herself — had indulged in the ineffable bliss of shopping, and had brought home many elegant articles of household furnishing conveyed in the ships from France, so that the interior of the mansion was fine to behold.

The fireplace in the hall was now filled with feathery stalks of asparagus. Over the mantel-tree hung an immense pair of buck's antlers, — showing twenty prongs, — on which rested sundry

fire-arms and the elegantly jewel-hilted sword of the late commandant. Rush mats, woven by the Indians, were scattered here and there, as well as in all the rooms, in place of carpets.

In the dining room was a cabinet with glass doors, behind which madame disported her best porcelain cups and saucers imported from France. On a spindle-legged mahogany buffet sundry silver posset-cups and hand-servers were conspicuously placed. The pewter ware, — for everyday use, — scoured to emulating brightness, was tucked away in a great cupboard in the shadowy alcove made by the projection of the huge chimney. The fireplace itself was not the least ornamental thing in the room; in summer, as now, it billowed over with long asparagus plumes; in winter, within it, comfort-bringing flames leaped and flashed, avidly devouring logs of beech and hickory, thick as a man's body. A large buffalo hide lay in front of it. Rush-bottomed chairs were set precisely around the wall.

In the grande salle a couch had been contrived, and over it was spread a gay chintz cover in a pattern of bright, wreathing roses, much esteemed, it was said, by her gracious Majesty, Antoinette, to whom they all secretly bowed down from afar. A striking silhouette of madame

hung above the fireplace, its black outlines mercifully ignoring most of her facial defects. Opposite it, between the two broad front windows, was suspended "The Passion," a copper-plate of much excellence. On the outer wall-space was a superb half-length portrait of Monsieur Dubois, done in the prime of young manhood while on a tour in France. It represented him as elegantly habited in a coat of velvet, heavily embroidered with gold, with deep lace ruffles pendent from the sleeves; a shirt of finest lawn beruffled with lace, flowed over upon a waistcoat of flowered silk. His own dark locks were roached high and tied with a ribbon behind. It was the likeness of a remarkably personable man, disfigured in later years by the fat of idleness and good living.

This apartment had also its capacious fireplace, which bore no small part on winter nights toward illuminating it, helping out the candles in the high silver candle-sticks, and the sconces disposed about on the wall. The guest-chamber lay behind the grande salle. Half a dozen yards to the rear of the mansion was a brick boulangère, or bakehouse, where all the cooking and baking was done at the great fireplace hung with cranes, and in the big oven. The

food was carried across the intervening space to the dining room by the panis, of whom Colonel Dubois had many, twice enslaved ; for Peggy, the negro cook, herself a chattel, held them under most despotic rule.

Ferriby was borne to the guest-chamber, which was large and airy. The high-post bed, with its snowy valance, was piled full of feather ticks, the plumage of wild geese and ducks having been ravaged to fill them. Over them was spread sheets of homespun linen, made from the wild flax which grew abundantly there, scented sweet with dried rose-leaves, ready to receive her into their cool cherishing.

They laid her down tenderly, and madame came forward, full of kindness, to take upon herself as a matter of course, the care of this stranger. Into this home Ferriby was received with the boundless hospitality of the pioneer, who never stopped to calculate what the return might be. That the wayfarer was poor and needy, was sufficient to establish a claim on his good offices ; it was only right to share his better lot with him.

The girl had hardly made a motion of life, except for a faint flutter of her eyelids, and an evanid stain on her cheeks as her hand fell against the sharp edge of the bed, so utterly bound in

weariness of the flesh, and spent in grief was she.

Madame straightened the bedclothes and said: "Poor little one! Is it long she has been like this? Much she needs tender care!"

Father Gibault replied: "Your compassion pleases me, Madame Dubois; for I perceive that le bon Dieu has touched your heart, and this poor wanderer will be well cared for. She has lain as you see her now for about six and thirty hours. Be not alarmed. It is only the temporary heaviness which follows too great stress of mind and body."

The priest was something of a physician, as all Jesuits were, and he gently smoothed the pallid brow of the girl as he spoke. "The shock which reduced her to this has been something great. Be prepared, madame. She may awake in full possession of her powers; and she may, by the will of the good God, be mercifully bereft of all, and remain a *crétin* to the end of her days."

"The Saints forbid!" fervently ejaculated madame.

"Should that prove the case, we will take her to the good nuns at Quebec. There she will find asylum if we fail to discover her friends." Madame's three daughters were standing in a group

aside, listening; Élise with haughty coldness far too pronounced for her nineteen years; Jeanne with sad but resigned air, strongly at variance with her youthful face, as if she had long since made up her mind that sorrow constituted the most of life, — a nun at seventeen; Suzanne, her twin, had stinging tears running down her red puffy cheeks, entirely quenching the light of mischief which usually blazoned her bright black eyes.

“She shall be my sacred charge,” murmured Jeanne; “I will put up a petition for her night and morning.”

“Good child!” said Father Gibault, gently, “Heaven grants the prayers of the sincere.”

“And I, father will run my feet off, waiting on her!” cried Suzanne, eagerly.

“And forget what you’re running for on the way, while stopping to play some teasing trick,” said Élise aside, scornfully.

But Father Gibault overheard her, and turned to her reprovngly and said:—

“It is the spirit of holy charity, Élise, that is good in the child, no matter if performance fall short. But thou, my daughter, seem to have none for the forlorn one nor for thy sister.”

It was as stern a rebuke as the gentle priest

was capable of, and Élise's scornful face flushed red, and her eyes flashed resentfully as they rested on the face of the newcomer.

"'Tis another girl in the house, and there were enough already!" she muttered.

CHAPTER XV

THE RETURN OF LANCASTER

LANCASTER disposed of his peltries to the traders at Detroit to such good advantage that he felt well repaid for the long, perilous journey he had taken. On a bright June morning he set off to return to the spot in the far wilderness where dwelt the woman he loved. But the thought of her on whom his passionate hopes centred filled him with unwonted misgivings, — fears that never before had troubled his bold mind. The way was long, the perils many. Would he ever see her again? He had safely made the portage at O-mee, had floated down the pellucid, sea-green waters of the upper Ouibache, and had hailed with joy the clustering We-a villages at the mouth of the Tip-pecha-nunk. Here he parted company with the French traders who had set him on his way thus far, and here he took to the We-a Trail through the forest, which would bring him to within a half-day's journey of the cabin.

Across the fen-like portage, down the long sweep of the river, had lurked menacing possibilities, now all safely passed. But alone in the still solitude of the forest intangible fear again assailed him. Life had a distinct value now, because it held the priceless possession of Ferriby's love. As he pushed on through thick umbrageous dusk his heart would sink like lead, and his pace slacken. In the sunny glades his spirits would rise with the buoyancy of the milkweed down, and he would speed forward with joy and eagerness.

After three days' journeying by the trail he began to recognize the landmarks. Here was the towering elm wreathed with wild grape-vine, which, when he set out, had flung its redolence abroad; so sweet, it seemed to him, with new wonder, to be love etherealized! Now grapes had formed, large as buck-shot, set amid young leaves. His ear was trained to hear the slightest sounds, and to distinguish between them. To the frontiersman, hearing is a more potent sense than sight; for sound carries its message through material barriers that would baffle the eye; stone walls are its unwilling agents; wind is its faithful servitor; it can interpret where sight and smell and touch would be defeated. The rush

of falling water, far out of sight, told him that the little cataract at the stockade was near, and that in a few lagging moments he would behold it. He climbed the high hill that shut it off from view toward the north. Half a mile beyond lay the cabin. Here he left the We-a Trail and followed the path downward, crossed the stream, and climbed the steep bluff to the level above. He pushed on eagerly, now flinging aside the long limb of a beech, now crashing through thickets to shorten the way. His eager feet soon brought him to the spot where he knew he could catch first sight of the cabin. Here he halted, as if checked suddenly by a long-flung lasso. He pressed his hand over his eyes, as if they were cheated with horrid visions. He looked again! Before him lay a ruined home! He crashed through every impediment till he reached the spot. The cabin was partly destroyed by fire, and pitying nature had already tried to mask its devastation by entwining it with bindweed and wild-cucumber vine. Everything in the garden had grown rank and tall. High weeds closed in the place with a green wall, as if to hide the sorrowful wreck, and keep it sacred for his coming. Lancaster recalled his self-control, and went forward trembling with

fear, sweating with terror, at thought of the awful horrors awaiting him within that ravaged home. He pushed through the outer phalanx of high weeds, gorgeous yellow mustard that had truly grown tall enough to shelter the fowls of the air; he trod upon the great jimson, loaded with purple trumpets, which, crushed by his heel, blew him a blast of fetid odor. He tore from the doorway — where the door hung forlornly on one leather hinge — the vines that criss-crossed it like a great web, and looked within. The worst confronted him! Desolation! For a time he was stupefied, and stood staring, dull and motionless. A fluttering roused him. A swallow beat its wings in wild circling about the enclosure, then darted up the chimney with shrill, sharp cries of fear. He mechanically looked up the stack, — as one does do strange acts under calamitous conditions, — and saw a shelf-like nest full of fledglings stuck against the chimney. The mother-cry roused the brood to loud clamoring. And it tore its way through Lancaster's dull senses; a wail broke from his lips. Nature told him by these small creatures that this home had been desolate for many days. He wept aloud. But his tears were soon dried by awful anger and fierce desire for revenge. With portentous

calmness he looked about him. Blank ruin met him everywhere. His searching eye caught a stain of red on the smooth log near the door. He walked over to it, and saw written there roughly with keel, these words:—

“All in this house perished by the hand of the Indians. A party of hunters found the bodies of an old woman, a middle-aged man, and a child. All had been scalped. They were buried in one grave beneath the big pine tree under the ridge north of the cabin, on the 5th day of May, 1778. Their innocent blood calls for vengeance!”

Lancaster read it again, dully realizing through his despair that no mention was made of a girl. Hope stirred in his soul, and for an instant grief was banished by wild joy at the possibility of Ferriby's escape. Saner thoughts brought with them the awful conviction, that if she were a prisoner among the savages, hers was the more terrible fate; worse, far worse, than death!

As he hurried to the doorway, his foot struck some small object and sent it spinning before him, with a sharp tinkling that attracted his attention. He stooped to look at it; then snatched it up eagerly.

It was the broken bowl of a calumet, and on it was carven, roughly but spiritedly, the head of an

antelope! Therein lay a clew, for he knew the antelope was the Manitou of the Puans, and that the murderers must be of that tribe. He stowed it in his hunting-pouch, and quickly sought the place of sepulture. It was only an arrow-shot's distance from the spot where he had parted with Ferriby not two months ago. It was marked by a heap of green logs piled over it to balk the ravening wolves. Above this grave of a household, mortal grief was dried up by an infuriate burning for revenge.

Lancaster looked down upon it a moment, then raised his right hand to heaven, and cried: "If there is a God in heaven, help me to find her, and avenge them! The rest of my life I will spend to this end."

With a despairing look around he left the place, and followed the little stream which would bring him to the crossing of the trail.

CHAPTER XVI

MADE CAPTIVE

LANCASTER'S terrible discovery made him forgetful of the forest foe, the scourge of the white man,—and he moved recklessly along the path he had chosen till it crossed the We-a Trail. He had formed no plan, but the human mind insensibly shapes a course,—purpose once taken,—and sooner or later it is followed. He dimly recalled that a new post had been established on La Belle Rivière, far southward, at the junction of the Ouibache. An inward monitor urged him to go there. The Ouibache once reached, he hoped to fall in with French traders bound for Biloxi or New Orleans, who would give him passage to the new fort in their batteaux.

He followed the trail for a few miles, then turned to the west, pursuing his course till he came to a place where numerous tracks crossed, traversing the forest, worn hard by the passage of the tribes on peaceful errands. He chose one and followed it with no uncertainty, assured by

minute signs known to the woodsman and the savage. It was not terrifying to Lancaster to thread the mazes of the wilderness, nor did he fear hunger. He could provide for his wants as unfailingly as the birds of the air, the buffalo on the prairie, the deer in the coppice. Now a handful of wild berries, or the rich overflow of a bee-tree betrayed by a homing bee, or a fish caught by his deft hand from the stream, gave him sustenance. A man of the wilderness is not the helpless creature of the town.

With a mind so distracted, bodily fatigue was nothing to him. When he reached the broad, tawny stream, no creature was in sight; it rolled in solemn loneliness through the forest. His disappointment was bitter. Failing the Frenchmen, he had hoped to meet with a hunting-party of friendly Indians, from whom he might hear of the Puans. He retreated into the wood to find shelter and a lookout from which he could observe the river and plain. As he pushed through the tangle of paw-paw and hazel to the gentle slope, sly faces peeped at him from the coppice and from behind tree-boles, circling like squirrels sighting him. When he reached the summit, he drew a long spent breath that acted like a signal; for from covert sprang a

band of a score of savages. Their faces were horribly smeared with ochre and keel. Some were naked; others wore a clout of buckskin. Their heads were pranked out with feathers, token they were on the war-path. All were furnished with scalping-knives and steel hatchets. Some were armed with rifles and had shot pouches of otter-skin, and buffalo horns for powder that swung against their bare rumps with every motion. They were a party of fierce Shewanees, allies of the English,—in peaceful times, sworn enemies of the strong Puans; in war against the whites, their brothers. Both tribes were out of their own hunting-grounds, and Lancaster much mistrusted that their business was other than a peaceful migration to the common grounds of the Kentucky country.

A young warrior rushed upon Lancaster, brandishing a hatchet. He involuntarily blenched at the quick thought of the blade crashing through his skull. But the blow was stayed by the stern command of the warrior chief. The young brave dropped his weapon to his arm's length and glared at Lancaster with a concentration of rage and hate that had directed the hatchet. It was Ah-mah-nac-o, the Yellow Wolf!—renegade from the friendly We-as, joined to the hired

assassins of the British. Lancaster well knew it was for vengeful murder he was attacked, not for the reward offered for a scalp. He had taken care while in Detroit to have his blue-black locks sheared to the skin, that they might not offer temptation to the scalp-hunter; for he had heard ugly rumors there which had put him on his guard.

Yellow Wolf scowled fiercely, and muttered:—

“The White Rose, where is she?”

“You red devil! *You* tell me where she is or, by Heaven, I’ll brain you!” cried Lancaster, enraged, swinging aloft the butt of his rifle to bring it down in a crushing blow on the fellow’s head. Instantly he was bound with bark ropes, soon to be the tortured plaything of the savages, as he well knew.

“Tell me, Ah-mah-nac-o, is Ferriby alive?” he demanded, while they were securing him.

The only answer the savage made was to draw the rope tighter till it buried itself deep in Lancaster’s flesh. Not a sound did he utter, for he knew the cruel act was an affirmative answer, the petty revenge of a thwarted man.

The savages retired to their camp, not far off, cunningly hidden in a thicket, where they found preparation for supper going forward. Though the sun had not set on the prairie, it was rapidly

growing dusky in the forest, and the camp-fire sent abroad a wide cheerful glow, that reached as far as the sapling to which Lancaster was bound. All was bustle and hurry; but the supper was not forthcoming as speedily as the warriors wished, and they became hungrier and more irritable, tantalized by the clouds of savory steam. Ah-mah-nac-o, with fiendish insight, perceived that soon, without some diversion, contentions would arise, if nothing worse. He approached the chief and made some request. The braves standing near by laughed, clapped their hands, and jumped for joy. Some snatched up fallen limbs and reduced them to clubs; others tore off long brambles; some broke stout stems of coppice, bristling at the top with wiry twigs; others trusted to their brawny fists, which they knotted and relaxed in trial. All this had sinister meaning to Lancaster.

The Indians formed in two long lines down one of the natural aisles of the forest, torn out in primeval times by a savage wind that left it vacant for always. Wide apart they stood, devilish satisfaction on their dark visages. One came to Lancaster and unbound him, stripped him to the skin, and he knew that the fearful ordeal of "running the gantlet," was before him.

At the far end of this murderous lane Ah-mah-nac-o was stationed, his lips parted in a wicked smile of triumph; for if the victim eluded the others, he could not escape the Yellow Wolf.

To Lancaster the lines appeared to stretch endlessly and the space between to be hopelessly narrow. But he was wiry, agile, and fleet; and made valiant by the hope that Ferriby was alive, he trusted to gain life and liberty in the end. The race began. One tweaked his flesh with fingers of nipping steel; another slashed him to the raw with a withe of leather-wood; one laced a pattern in blood on his cheeks with wiry twigs; snakelike briers twined round his legs and left a spiral of red welts; a great oak cudgel just missed cracking his skull; one ear-lobe was torn from the cheek by a cruel jerk; his feet were crushed by billets of wood.

When a savage missed his aim, derisive yells spurred on the next to do his utmost. Smeared with blood, Lancaster flashed by them, twisting and writhing this way and that, ducking and leaping under and over. Perfect master of his body, he escaped many a hurt. The end was reached. With the sweat of agony washing his scarred cheeks, blood smearing his vision, he saw his vengeful foe the last of the line. In

a wild bound he leaped sideways toward the Yellow Wolf, threw himself on the ground, rolled over and over, like a ball, from out the murderous line; and Ah-mah-nac-o's hatchet — barred on such occasions — fell impotent in a miscalculated blow, directed with such terrific force as to topple over the would-be assassin.

Shouts of laughter greeted Yellow Wolf's mischance, and put the war chief, — "Big Hand," — who had been a spectator at this amazing show, in so fine a humor that he declared the sport over. He grunted his approval when the blood-smeared ball stood upright — a man!

Fearful need of courage made Lancaster dumb, and oblivious to pain, — panting and gasping, it is true, but silent. His escape was so marvellous that the savages regarded him with awe. The war chief cried with admiration: —

"White man good brave! He shall be one of Big Hand's warriors! He shall be a son of the Shewanees!"

CHAPTER XVII

THE ESCAPE

At the conclusion of the feast, gorged to satiety, the savages threw themselves down to sleep, but not before they secured their prisoner for the night. Lancaster had mistrustfully observed Ah-mah-nac-o, usually the most indolent of savages, busy preparing two stakes from saplings which he had cut near by. After driving them into the earth, he and two other bucks took up Lancaster by head and heels, and laid him on the ground near a small haw tree.

They bound his feet to the stakes, which were set widely apart, passed a bark rope around his neck and made it fast to the little tree in such a way that if he strove to free himself, his efforts would end in strangling. His arms were extended, and a pole was laid across his breast to their extreme length; and these members were lashed to it with strips of green leather-wood bark. On either hand lay a warrior to guard him, one of whom was the Yellow Wolf. Thus

Lancaster lay till morning, his muscles twitching and cramping with the strain until the pain became agonizing, and he could scarcely restrain shrieks of agony. It was succeeded by a merciful numbness; but sleep did not visit him the night through.

His wounded, naked body was chilled with the mists of the morning till his teeth rattled like the tail of the venomous "she-she-note." Thirst tortured him, and his mouth lay open with the crowding of his swollen tongue. It seemed as if the rope around his neck cut off his wind, and his chest heaved in the effort to breathe. Not a groan nor cry escaped him! He knew that yielding to the tortures of pain would incite the savages to further cruelty.

At last the deep blackness of the forest, which neither the few glancing stars nor the late-rising moon could lighten, began to change to a gauzy gray haze as fine as a lady's veil. Birds commenced a tentative twittering; now and then a swift pair of wings whirled as the timid grouse left their nesting places. The cub squirrels played in the early dawn, running, leaping, chattering, unmindful of the heavy sleepers. Far and faint, the rustling in the hazel thickets, the sharp stamp and snort that sent the herd off in swift flight,

warned him that the deer had left covert for another timorous day. He could hear the ponies cropping the crisped grass. But the gluttoned savages slept on, despite these signs of dawn. Not one awoke till a long shaft fell across a warrior's eyes, and he roused with a grunt and groan. He rolled over and all were awakened.

As there was nothing left over from the feast to eat, they at once prepared for the day's journey. When all was in readiness for the march, Lancaster—who had begun to think he was to be left behind to die in the forest, as no notice had been taken of him—was approached by two young bucks, who untenderly cut the rasping cords sunk deep in his swollen flesh. By signs they ordered him to rise, and laughed uproariously at his efforts; for his stiffened muscles refused his bidding. He clinched his teeth, that no groan might shame him before them, and tried again and again, until at last he was on his feet, ready, as he supposed, to take up the march.

While he was trying to overcome his inertness, three or four savages were engaged in capturing a young stallion which followed the herd peacefully enough, but was fierce and unbroken,—a very demon. With lassos and long goads they so far subdued him as to tie him with thongs of

bull-hide to a sapling. With ears laid flat, lips rolled, teeth snapping, eyes flashing with rage, heels lashing, he presented a picture of unconquerable fury. At last they threw him down upon his knees, and on the back of this raging beast they bound Lancaster. His feet were tied together under the brute's belly, his arms were fastened securely to his sides at the elbows, and moccasins were thrust over his hands and secured with strings, that he might not shield himself from the lashing of brush and bramble. Another rope was passed round his neck, one end of which was tied to the horse's head, the other to the tail; still another bound his thighs and lashed his body to the animal.

While the Indians were at this fiendish employment they leaped and gibed, and uttered shrieks of delight at the fierce resistance of the beast. The victim was passive. When all was done, they turned the stallion loose. Away he dashed in mighty plunges. Blinded by rage, leaping over fallen timber, barely escaping destruction from the great boles of the standing trees; shaking, rearing, pawing in vain effort to dislodge his burden; crashing through thickets till the withes lashed the wounds of the wretched man into a thousand bleeding stripes; leaping gullies that



“ Away he dashed in mighty plunges.”

yawned wide for their destruction ; flying like an arrow shot from a bow through grassy glades, — for long the beast fled, sides heaving, breath sobbing, in a fearful race whose goal was destruction.

At first Lancaster was stupefied with despair. Having the use of neither arms nor legs, he resigned himself to a speedy end. When the rage and terror of the stallion subdued as fatigue overcame him, Lancaster's hope revived. He began to use his voice, and by pressure of his legs on the animal's side, to exercise control ; and the horse for the first time yielded to the mastery of a human will. He settled into a dejected walk, then came to a halt, and turned his flaming eyes toward Lancaster in piteous submission. Instinct, that quality which men lack that would place them among the gods, came into play in the animal, and he sought his herd. Turning, he took a new direction, which Lancaster knew to be north by the long sun-seeking limbs of the crowded saplings. The weary horse walked steadily on with lowered crest, now and then stopping to drink from the shining cold streams that trickled from the deep gorges which cleft the forest.

The man endured torture while the beast swilled long, refreshing draughts. Hunger was

forgot in raging thirst. At last they struck the We-a Trail, and at sunset the exhausted horse whinnied feebly as they entered a little dell, shut in by paw-paws and arrow-wood and twisting vines. He left the beaten track and forced an entrance through the thick boscage.

Lancaster, somewhat revived by the weakling hope he had cherished, now gave up utterly to despair. He felt indeed forsaken of God and man. The animal's instinct had been infallible. Before him lay the camp of his torturers, and near at hand browsed the herd.

The savages could hardly recognize the man; but of the identity of the beast they had no doubt. With wild shouts they rushed toward them; but the war chief, Big Hand, ordered them back, and selecting two young braves, bade them unbind Lancaster.

They lifted him from the stallion more dead than alive. He was past caring what further fate might visit upon him. Big Hand regarded his apathy with favor; it was proof of a warrior's spirit.

One youth, of kindlier nature than his fellows, helped him to a wigwam. His naked body was a mass of welts and bruises laid over his old wounds, now turning to green and purple

blotches. The savage bathed him, gave him water, and saw him fall back in deathlike exhaustion with complacency. Was it not the test of a warrior, which he himself had undergone before he was fit to be numbered among the braves? Lancaster was again securely bound, and he sank into a coma of weariness, so that neither sleeping nor waking thoughts troubled him.

He was roused at dawn, and so tremendously vital was his forest-nurtured strength that he felt refreshed despite his cruel hurts. His ministering friend gave him bears' grease to dress his wounds, and brought him a morsel of food, which he devoured ravenously. The fever in his wounds had subsided, and youth responded in him, and made him able to endure the long march of that day. They filed through the sombre forest, full of flitting birds and wildly fleeing beasts, and came to a great stretch of prairie, now brilliant with myriad June flowers, set in tall seeding grasses. At last a flash dazzled them from out the far green. The war chief grunted with satisfaction. It was the stately Ouibache. A few leagues above this point lay hidden snugly their canoes, and a raft for the ponies which would bear them back to their village.

Lancaster's heart sank, for the last hope of escape fled at sight of the river. They would take him to the village and practise unnameable horrors on him, or make him the meanest of slaves. His sole chance of escape had lain in their camping that night.

When they reached the brink of the river, a herd of startled deer flashed their red sides by them; not so swiftly but that a brocket fell dead at the crack of Yellow Wolf's rifle. Jaded and hungry after the long day's march, they could not resist the chance to gorge. In the gathering dusk the inferior braves built a fire of drift-wood and dead grasses. They spitted gobbets of yet warm flesh on bending green withes, and not waiting to more than sear, devoured them; some ate their portions raw. So drowsily content did they become afterward, they resolved to camp again instead of seeking the boats five miles farther up-stream. They replenished the fire and capered about the flames in a fantastic fire-dance, groaning a barbaric chant, now and then discharging a gun to add to the uproar. The old warriors looked on impassively, smoking their willow bark. Lancaster, to whom they had become accustomed, was carelessly guarded by one young brave, who was completely absorbed

in watching the fire-dance, in which he could not take part.

As the flames leaped higher, the dance grew madder; a frenzy, an ecstasy! When the moon came lingeringly, she threw the sad light of her flattened orb on as mad a scene as ever Eblis saw. The river at this point flowed strongly between its clay banks. In the centre a brawling current swept swiftly, turbulently, as if impeded by deeply bedded boulders; but close to the shore the water spread calm as a mill-pond.

Lancaster, whose hands and feet were still bound with bark rope, looked on apathetically. Chanting had resolved into wild, incoherent shrieks, to which now and again an old warrior added a deep guttural note. Oblivious to all else, they were possessed of a mania for noise and motion. One young buck in mad excitement twirled his scalping-knife high. It flew over the heads of the revellers and buried itself in the earth near Lancaster; he alone saw it. He bit the bark from his wrists, tearing at it like a rending beast till his hands were loose. He snatched up the knife, slashed the rope on his feet. He was free!—amid a band of savages, a stretch of prairie behind, a raging torrent before. Not an instant did he lose; he crept to the margin and

plunged into the tossing current mid-stream. Some fine ear caught the splash amid all the clamor, and with a yell the savages discovered their loss. A dozen guns were levelled at him with deadly aim, but they had been emptied in the wild dance.

Lancaster's course was instantly taken. He saw in the wan light, with the power of a hundred eyes, that fifty yards to the south lay a dense thicket of willows growing up to the margin of the river. These he must reach or perish! But he was swimming against the current upstream, wasting his depleted strength in futile effort to battle with the wild flood. He threw up his arms again and again in vain struggle for life. The savages shouted derisively at his folly. Each time he seemed to drop lower, and struggle harder, till at last he sank with the plunge of a plummet before their eyes. The moon was covered by a film of clouds and her light obscured. The Indians, anticipating the end, made no effort to save Lancaster. They watched the place where he had gone down, but the body did not rise again. All returned to the fire but two old, suspicious warriors, who gazed with fascinated eyes on the spot where Lancaster had sunk. Neither noticed a dark object floating in the water not far below

where they stood, for their eyes were cast outward.

Lancaster had dived, and swam under water down-stream, gradually nearing the shore. He had acquired the art of swimming in deep water with his body erect and entirely submerged, using his feet only, much as in walking, so that there was little disturbance on the surface. He could keep under water two or three minutes at a time, which sufficed to take him away from mid-channel, on which the old Indians gazed. When he had passed their line of vision, he was far enough from them to thrust his nose out of water for a breath, and immediately sank again. And thus cautiously he made his way beneath the water, under their very eyes, to the covert he had chosen. When the camp fell into heavy slumber, he hid in the willows, and in the early dawn watched their departure, naked, hungry, half dead, but free!

CHAPTER XVIII

IN HIDING

WHEN Lancaster was convinced that he had outwitted his enemies, the strength which despair had given him left him as suddenly as the smoke from a trodden puff-ball, and as utterly collapsed. He was so exhausted he had hardly strength to drag his worn body up on the sand under the screening of the willows. His swim in the river had been grateful to his wounds, and had soothed their pain. Companionship with the stinging, creeping things which disported themselves on the beach was delightful after the fierce company of the savage. Some hours passed, and he was appalled to find that he had lost control of his muscles; that he was a sentient being as powerless as a felled tree. He could not move from the shallow imprint his bulk had made in the sand. That he was naked and destitute as when he entered the world did not now trouble him more than then. If he might have use of his strong and sturdy legs, he could supply his more vital

needs. Through the beneficence of Providence, in whom he somewhat vaguely believed, the forest would furnish him food and raiment for the taking. But not by the most strenuous willing could he help himself.

He groaned in impotent rebellion against Nature's course with him, who like a wise and kind mother looked to his welfare. She locked fast his senses in sleep in which pain, hunger, desolation, and revenge were made naught. His terrible experience and overweening fatigue called for entire repose, and he slept unbrokenly for nearly two days.

He was awakened at last by a clammy contact with his out-thrown hand. He roused with a shock of surprise to his surroundings, just as a huge turtle scuttled into the water. Then memory overwhelmed him with all he had endured. He attempted to leap to his feet and fell back groaning. But pain must be overcome; constricted muscles must be made supple by action, and after many trials he found himself on his feet. Hunger made him sick and giddy. He was afraid to leave covert in search of food, as it was now bright day. The sunlight filtered through the dancing leaves of his retreat almost vertically, and he had no idea of the time that

had passed since he had last seen it. He crept to the brink of the river and drank of the muddy water. Then he recalled the scuttling turtle, and he began to search for eggs that he suspected she had deposited in the sand, and was not long in finding them. He eagerly tore open their tough, opaque skins and ate till hunger was appeased.

He seated himself on the sand and dropped his head on his drawn-up knees. So close is the relation of flesh to spirit, that with food strength and courage revived. His ear, trained as stealthily as an Indian's, guarded the outposts of the mind, while his thoughts were busy planning relief for his desperate situation. Destiny had visited him with cruel defeat and cast him naked on a sandy shore. His resolution to find Ferriby strengthened. If she were alive, he would rescue her from worse than death; if no other way presented, he would take her life with his own hand. Better that than concubinage among the savages! He gazed dully out upon the dun waters of the Ouibache. An object crossed his strained vision. With a start he roused to its meaning. It was a canoe, thrown out of the mid-current into the calmer waters shore-ward. It drifted idly, and told mutely of disaster and ruin. Here was a

means of escape! He felt that he must secure it at whatever risk, — discovery by the savage or drowning. He plunged into the stream and struggled fiercely with his stiffened muscles. A swirl brought the craft within reach, and he managed to push it ashore. In it lay the silent witness to murder done, — a great red stain that showed where the body had slipped overboard; a roll of clothing such as trappers wore, thrown off in the exertion of rowing; a bundle of otter-skins, which, doubtless, the victim had thought to traffic with at O Poste. Lancaster's limbs trembled with the exertion. His head swam, a feeling of defeat came over him which so unmanned him that he nearly wept. Then fiery anger filled him that his strength should have so deserted him in this his time of need. He sternly mastered himself and resolved to set off that very night, under cover of darkness, by the river, which of late the Indians had abandoned; and for what reason the pioneers were slowly learning. When night fell, with it came showers. Lancaster dressed in the poor garments, buckskin jerkin and leggings, but they sufficed. A willow pole served him for an oar. He trusted much to the swift current to bear him to the American fort on La Belle Rivière, and set off on his long journey.

Sometimes he drowsed from weakness, then roused himself by sheer force of will. Now he drifted with scarcely a motion ; again, rushed with frightful velocity over rapids. In the early hours of the morning he saw against the sky a stain of red, like some gorgeous bird against the dazzling blue. It was a mere speck, but soon it showed motion, and rounding the great bend he saw the flag of King George ; below it lay the strong fortress of O Poste.

To him, a Virginian, the thought of falling into the hands of the English was little less agreeable than into those of the savages. He could not submit to the loss of another day, and detention would be fatal to his designs. He suspected the Puans whom he sought had gone to the south, where the greater number of American pioneers lived, — if not for scalps, then for buffalo, which at this season fed in great herds on the Drowned Lands.

It was not yet sun-up, and he resolved to await the moment of guard-mounting to slip by the stockade, which lay close to the bank, on a slight elevation above it. No man passed that way without accounting for himself, but Lancaster resolved to be the exception. As the sun rose, a gun boomed from the fort. Just then a fleet of

bark canoes set off down-stream from the Indian village opposite. Lancaster slipped among them, and it was not noticed that a half-naked, sun-browned white had passed the fort unchallenged.

CHAPTER XIX

CLARK'S GUIDE

THE Piankeshaws were bound for the Drowned Lands on a buffalo hunt, as Lancaster soon discovered. He also learned that the raid of the Puans was entirely unknown to them, living, as they were, peaceably under the walls of Fort Sackville. He parted from them after noon. With great friendliness they had provided for his wants, even to arming him. In return for their kindness he had presented them the bundle of otter-skins, and a few ounces of raw tobacco which he had found in the pocket of the trapper's jerkin; its "familiar," the corn-cob pipe, had probably gone the road its master had taken. With every appearance of regret the Indians saw his boat bear him away to the far-off Belle Rivière.

As Lancaster neared the falls, the white settlers became more numerous, and he did not fail to visit every cabin and stockade to make inquiry for his enemy, the Puan. At last he obtained news. A band of savages had been seen far to

the northwest, across the prairie, either bound for a "big hunt," or for Kaskaskia, where numerous bands had already gone to make submission to Rocheblave, now highest in authority in the Illinois country since the recall of Abbott. On hearing this, Lancaster hastened his journey, nor could his speed keep pace with his impatience. He gave up his design of going to Corn Island, and continued up the majestic current of La Belle Rivière for many days, sometimes alone, sometimes in the company of hunters and trappers, till at last he reached the little river, on which, a few miles above its mouth, Kaskaskia lay.

He found many tribes gathered there, but for what purpose he did not know, other than the pacific one given by the pioneers. His search was vain. No Puan was there! In despair he joined a party of hunters and trappers off to the Kentucky hunting-grounds. He declined their proffers of aid, except to set him on his way, as far as it might be theirs. He was not cheerful company, but the reckless frontiersmen respected his grief, on hearing his story, and he pursued his journey in their company in dull silence. Under the spell of his gloomy thoughts he did not observe that they were approaching an island;

and, more singular still, that a crowd of people were running hither and thither, like ants disturbed in an ant hill.

"What have we here?" said one of the rowers, in a low, uneasy tone.

"Are they enemies or friends?" asked another, anxiously.

They shipped their oars, and the boats dropped slowly and steadily toward the island. Each company gazed with absorbing interest at the other. With the long sight of the frontiersman they made out the points of feature and garb which proved the men on the island to be white men.

"But are they Kentuckians or English? *They* are worse than the red devils since this war of the colonies," muttered one man, angrily.

Meantime they reached hailing distance, and were bespoke from the shore. A loud challenge, which it was not prudent to disregard, caused them to row briskly to the island, under the cocked guns of as motley a crew as ever bore arms.

A squad of men, dressed in uncouth pioneer fashion, surrounded them as they landed, that were evidently under the command of a person who stood a little to one side. This man was in the prime of young manhood, of martial bearing, of tremendous vitality and athletic strength. His

figure was so perfectly symmetrical that it had the effect of lessening his stature until it was brought into close contrast with men of ordinary height. His large head was covered with a fall of light brown hair that lay upon his shoulder. A strong hooked nose gave severity to his countenance, which a generous mouth with firmly closed lips mitigated. His cheeks and lips were smooth-shaven. His skin, naturally fair, was like a well-tanned hide, from exposure. His cold, deep blue eyes regarded the newcomers with a gaze that nothing could disconcert, and read them like a horn-book,

This backwoods commander was endowed with a presence of majesty, a genius for military strategy, a leadership of men. His manner possessed a dignity which could unbend to affability, even gayety. Combined with these qualities was the dash and vigor of the ordained conqueror.

The prisoners, for such Lancaster and his companions were until they proved their friendliness were led into the presence of this man, and they instinctively felt his superiority, and evinced it by a restless shifting of feet, falling of eyes under his searching look. At last his lips unclosed, and he spoke in a full round voice with no uncertain ring of dominance. He addressed

himself to the leader, whom he picked out with unerring sagacity.

"You are Englishmen?"

"No; Americans."

"Why are you here?"

"We are lately settled in the Illinois country, and are now bound for the Kentucky hunting-grounds on a big hunt."

The face of Clark relaxed somewhat from its severity, for well he knew the charm of a "big hunt."

"Were you aware that the Indians are on the war-path, and that they are to be rewarded for the delivery of the scalps of the American pioneers to the forts at Kaskaskia and O Poste?"

"No, sir; not until this fellow joined us," he said, pointing to Lancaster, who stood a few paces aside.

The commander's glance had briefly settled on him more than once. Now he addressed Lancaster:—

"Why did you join this party?" he asked Lancaster, without a hint in his tone of that suspicion which he secretly held.

"I hoped to cross the grand prairie on a private enterprise, on the trail of a tribe hunting there."

"Ah! Perhaps you could be induced to relate

what that private enterprise is." His tone was equivalent to a command.

"It is only another story of the treachery and brutality of the savage," said Lancaster. "But if it be your humor to hear it, I will tell it."

The commander led Lancaster aside, for his sympathy and perception were as keen as his tact and invention were ready. Lancaster related the story to him, rousing his compassion and interest. Lover the commander never had been, nor ever would be; and down deep in his warlike soul there might have been a touch of impatience, that a man, young and strong, should let such a blow crush him, as he perceived the loss of the girl had the youth.

With feelings refined by grief almost to clairvoyance, Lancaster felt this unexpressed scorn, and it braced him like cool, pure air. He straightened his drooping shoulders, set his lips firmly, banished the half-insane melancholy from his eyes, and gave the man look for look as courageous as his own. He stood before him as goodly a man as he, and a tenderer.

The commander smiled faintly, rejoicing in the pluck that could be roused by the challenge of an eye. It won his respect and confidence.

"I will trust you, my man, as I will none of

your fellows. I am Clark of Virginia, commissioned by Governor Patrick Henry to wrest the French towns in the Illinois country from the English."

"It is a tremendous design!" said Lancaster, involuntarily letting his gaze wander toward the men who composed the invading army,—less than two hundred all told.

"You fear failure, I perceive," said Clark. "They are tried, picked men, and victory is not always to numbers,"—drawing himself up proudly,— "and I, Clark, am leader!"

His superb courage heartened Lancaster. It was an enterprise wilder and more daring than those rumored of the Continental army, garbled accounts of which reached even this wilderness outpost.

To one like Lancaster, worked up to the highest pitch of passion,—bitter hate, longing for revenge,—Clark's unfaltering determination that could not entertain the thought of an obstacle, appealed irresistibly. He no longer doubted the feasibility of his design. Indeed, he forgot he had held a momentary doubt.

Clark explained his plan of advance, and when he spoke of leaving La Belle Rivière at the little creek a few miles above old Massac, to march

across the prairie, thus greatly reducing the distance, Lancaster eagerly offered himself as guide; for this fell in with his own plans.

"Can you tell me the force of the garrisons at Sackville and Gates?" asked Clark.

"I know nothing definitely. Gates is the seat of power in the Illinois country, and is but carelessly guarded. Sackville is feebly garrisoned; by strategy I slipped under its stockade, a few days ago."

"You have the making of a soldier in you! 'Tis a thousand pities—" cried Clark, impatiently, then broke off his speech as he looked into the youth's pale, worn face, almost aged by grief with which he could not sympathize.

"Sir, is not a faithful lover good metal for a faithful soldier?" asked Lancaster, with simple dignity.

"Aye, aye! I doubt it not!" said Clark, hastily; then muttered to himself, "I could never become the father of cowards!" ending in a deep breath which in another would have been a sigh. Clark returned to the other men, whom he questioned separately. Better informed than Lancaster, they told him of the equipment of Fort Gates, and of the recall of Abbott from Sackville—for what reason they could not tell;

they only knew he had been gone many weeks, taking the greater part of the troop with him.

Clark's eye glowed, his frame stiffened into martial bearing. Already he could see the new flag of the colonies, which he had brought into the wilderness for the first time, floating proudly over Gates and Sackville; its thirteen stripes of snowy white and glowing red, emblem of the blood which flowed to make it, its barred blue field, replacing the hated crossbars of the British ensign. Perils, privations, and disasters faded into nothingness between that event and now, in his sanguine vision. Clark dismissed the hunters, accepted Lancaster as a guide, and immediately left the island in a fleet of canoes, with his four companies,—one hundred and fifty-four men all told,—as brave, even foolhardy, men as ever conquered empire.

They rowed to where the little creek emptied into La Belle Rivière, and hid their boats a short distance up the stream, then set out through the intervening wilderness to the prairie lying to the northwest more than a hundred miles. They marched for a day and a night, bivouacking for a few hours; and again for a day and a night. They broke through briers and low masses of shrubs, which filled the gaps of the virgin forest.

They filed in a long line, walking singly like Indians, and as silently as the nature of the forest would permit. Often the way led through noxious swamps, where long grasses grew deceptively, and plunged them into black bogs.

At last, under the aureate glow of the declining sun, the great dazzling, pathless stretch of the grand prairie lay before them, which only ended where the green mounted to the yellow that flooded the sky. Too spent and jaded to proceed farther that night, with hearts grateful for so much of shelter, they encamped among the low shrubs from which they had first beheld the prairie. They needed to recuperate their strength by sleep for the forced march across this great meadow, exposed to the eye of the haunting savage or the lurking British spy, and with thankfulness they couched upon the bare ground after the frugalest of suppers.

CHAPTER XX

“ BEWILDERED ”

IN the early dawn the camp was aroused for the hazardous march, which in a few hours, all going well, would bring them to Kaskaskia. Rations were exhausted to a scrap of corn bread, which each man munched as he marched. They plodded along till the fervor of the July sun became unpleasantly felt as it mounted the zenith. Lancaster anxiously scanned the far horizon and the billowy stretch between. Suddenly his look changed from one of easy confidence to faltering indecision. It was as if his mind had played him the part of a treacherous friend. He lost faith. Every landmark pointed falsely. His brain whirled till all sense of direction was lost in the motion. His soul was in a tumult of distress and anxiety. With the sun in mid-heaven he could not tell one direction from another.

Clark, sternly vigilant, saw his confusion and mistrusted the cause. With English spies patrolling the waterways, and Indian mercenaries ready

to spring from impossible ambush, it behooved men to be cautious to the point of suspicion. Clark knew not whether Lancaster's evident anxiety sprang from the failure of his confederates, or that confusion of mind which arises from bewilderment at the long-continued sameness of objects. He was a man of patience when he wished to exercise it, and of the most rapid action when it suited his purpose. He remained silent and wary. But his men, as they watched Lancaster's wild glance wander round and round in dazed uncertainty, weary from the three days' march, irritable from hunger, and worse than all, rabid with thirst, began to give signs of brutal fierceness. Mutterings broke into upbraidings. Scathing taunts and violent execrations fell from their lips. Their glaring eyes, bloodshot from heat and fatigue, gave them a fierce aspect. The line came to a halt, impatient as a troop of stallions.

"Why do you not press on, man?" asked Clark, in his ordinary controlled manner, but keenly observing Lancaster for any attempt at betrayal by sight or sound.

"Well — I fear — colonel, you will have to trust me till I get my bearings," faltered Lancaster. "They seem to have slipped from me until I can't tell north from south, nor east from west!"

"Has he decoyed us here to have us fall into the hands of the Indians?" asked Helm, suspiciously, in too loud an aside to the commander. Instantly arose a tumult of savage censure.

"Traitor! traitor!" cried Kenton.

"Spy!" cried another.

"English minion!"

Inflamed by the obvious mistrust of their superiors, the rank and file took it up with vengeful fury. Guns were levelled at Lancaster's breast, which was a fair mark as he stood facing them. His face was pale and anxious, but there was no blenching in his dauntless mien, no cowardice in the distressed eyes raised fully to Clark's face. Had Clark shown a jot of distrust, the man were doomed.

"You will certainly be killed, Lancaster," said he, in an equable voice, "if you have purposely misled us. *I* could not restrain these fellows if I would," motioning his hand toward the men, who had fallen back at his imperious gesture, huddled like a starved pack, — men who had gone through incredible hardship without a murmur, furious at the thought of betrayal.

They were indeed a savage-looking lot, with faces scratched and bloody from briers, lashed into welts from underbrush, splashed with black

bog-mud; with moccasins of bull-hide worn through, garments of buckskin tattered. They carried only their long rifles, trusting to the forest for shelter, food, and drink. After the first day game had been scarce, and they feared to fire a gun, so that they were in a state of ferine hunger, when men are fit for murder. Decoyed like animals to ignominious death, expecting momentarily to be fallen upon by a stealthy foe, from any quarter, their fury knew no bounds. A fair fight they gloried in, but this — the infamy of it made them savage as baited beasts.

Clark turned toward them, and at a look read them. For an instant he himself felt a flow of rage that nearly choked him. But he rarely gave his men clear insight as to his state of mind, or motives, and he controlled it resolutely, and again faced Lancaster.

There was an expression of noble justice on his countenance, and Lancaster recognized that here was one who could exercise the coolest judgment in the face of most damnatory inferences, suspicions that roused terrible anger; for Clark's eyes glittered irefully while his tongue spoke fairly.

Lancaster fell upon his knees before him, a suppliant who begged for the preservation of his honor, not for his life.

Clark was sensible of this when Lancaster cried in earnest, though not grovelling, entreaty:—

“I beg you, sir, give me one more chance! I am bewildered, as many of these men have been before me, on a great prairie.”

He looked around for some one to take his part even in so small a matter.

“That is true, colonel, as I can bear witness. Give him a chance to prove himself a man of honor!” said Simon Kenton, always a pacific man, yet, paradoxically, a furious fighter.

“That is all I want! To prove my honor!” cried Lancaster.

“You will prove your honor and innocence by speedily finding the way,” said Clark, coldly. “I can see that, by the nature of the country, one acquainted with it could hardly forget it,”—he paused impressively,—“but I will give you your chance!”

Lancaster sprang to his feet, his countenance glowing with gratitude. He looked Clark in the face, and began to speak, but was motioned to silence.

“But you are a doomed man if you fail!”

The words were spoken with such terrible finality that Lancaster, unnerved by all he had suffered, trembled and paled. His agitation

roused the placated suspicions of the men, who again, by word and look, urged his death.

“I only beg you to stay awhile on this spot — that —”

“The Indians may fall upon us in three or four times our number and massacre us!” interrupted a savage voice.

Again Clark silenced them.

He said to Lancaster: “The old Massac road cannot be far from here. Once find that, and it will lead us to Kaskaskia. We will stay here awhile, but not long.”

“I thank you, sir! not for my life’s but for my honor’s sake. I will set off at once!”

“Not so fast! Not alone!” observed Clark, a faint saturnine smile on his lips. “Here, Allen, Bush, Hays!” he ordered. “Accompany this man, and if by sundown he has not found the way, you will know your duty — how to serve a traitor!”

The guards named stepped forward, — young, stalwart, fierce, with menace in their looks which did not serve to restore Lancaster’s already over-shaken confidence.

“My life, sir, I will willingly forfeit. *I will find* the trail by evening!”

“Lead on, sir!” sternly commanded Clark.

They watched Lancaster as he scanned the sky and took his bearings by the sun, now a little declined toward the west, which was in his favor. He started toward the north, then irresolutely took an angling line to the southwest, followed it uncertainly a few paces; shifted again to the northwest; veered again till he had completed a circle, and thus progressed in visible uncertainty, closely dogged by his guards, till they became mere dots on the great sea of grass, now lost in the falling billow, then rising to view on the crest. Suddenly he changed again, seeming to have thrown off all hesitation, and proceeded steadily to the southwest.

Meanwhile Clark and his men watched anxiously and silently. Now and then some one cursed bitterly as he saw Lancaster's uncertainty. Some one laughed, — a more sinister sound than all the cursing!

"The man is a traitor!" cried Helm, with frightful imprecations.

"I think not!" replied Kenton, composedly. "He is only bewildered!"

"Time and patience will tell. We may as well rest during the hours we must wait!" said Clark, coolly. After appointing a sentry, he threw himself full length on the earth, placed an arm

over his eyes, and composed himself as if it were the most ordinary bed-going. In a few moments all followed his example, and were soon sleeping the sleep of sound, healthy, weary men.

Two hours passed like two seconds to the jaded sleepers, when the guard gave a low, peculiar cry, at which all started up. Confused with sleep, they snatched their knives from their belts, cocked their guns before the film of slumber had lifted from their angry eyes. Their vision cleared to behold four men approaching rapidly, success attested to by the buoyancy of their walk.

Approaching Clark, Lancaster said with visible satisfaction, "Sir, I have found the old Massac road!"

"Fall in!" was Clark's sole answer, but it implied how full was his faith.

In two hours' march they came upon a huge beech tree, the outpost of a sparse stretch of woods that followed a small stream. They found buried deep in its overgrown bark an iron plate on which, in faded red figures, were numbered the miles to Kaskaskia.

When the moon rose, like a pearl disk, and the great red sun dropped suddenly from the arching rim of the prairie, they were in sight of Fort Gage, in the village of Kaskaskia.

CHAPTER XXI

CLARK AND FATHER GIBAULT

SILENTLY as ghosts, in the early hours of the night, the little army was ferried across the narrow river. They were divided into squads and deployed about the town. Without a struggle Rochblave, the commandant, was captured in his bed and yielded up the garrison to the Virginians. The capture of the neighboring French villages, Cahokia and Prairie du Rocher, followed, and in less than a fortnight every villager had sworn allegiance to the Americans, and Clark was in command of the fort. It was too easy a conquest. In this tame submission there was no element of victory; and Clark could not be content till the flag of the colonies floated over Sackville on the distant Ouibache.

Pondering these things in the privacy of his quarters, one day, he was interrupted by the entrance of three men, ushered in by his second officer, Helm.

Clark received them in a manner of guarded

friendliness. They were Father Gibault, the Jesuit priest whose curacy extended over most of the Illinois country; Dr. La Fitte, the largest trafficker among the savages, besides being the only medical man thereabout; and an interpreter.

Clark waited courteously for them to disclose their errand through their interpreter, Lieutenant Gerault, about which they seemed to be timid. Father Gibault's spare figure, ascetic face, and priestly garb were in striking contrast to the huge frame, strong, tanned visage, and tattered, muddy garments of his host. Clark looked almost burly and quite savage in comparison.

"I am at your service, sir," said the priest, and a shade of anxiety was disclosed in his manner, though his voice was smooth and pleasantly modulated. In the presence of the strong worldling he had an air of timorousness suggestive of the cloister.

Clark expressed his pleasure at meeting his visitors with the ready courtesy of the Virginian, but did not help them by further speech. He seemed silently gauging their faithfulness.

"It may be unwise to speak of it," said the priest, hesitantly, "but we have heard a rumor that you intend to advance on O Poste."

"I intend no less! and it is about that I wish

to consult you," answered Clark, in his crisp, imperious voice.

He was not surprised at Father Gibault's disclosure, for he had made no secret of his aims, after Kaskaskia had taken the oath of allegiance. He shrewdly put the villagers on their honor by trusting them at once. He openly avowed his intention to retake the French towns in the Illinois country from the English, and add them, as well as the vast territory itself to the colony of Virginia. His commission, he told them, was granted him by the great Patrick Henry.

"Give me your opinion," continued Clark, "as briefly as you can, for I have but half an hour at your disposal."

Father Gibault was a curious mixture of timidity—inseparable from a compassionate nature—and the finest courage. He was easily abashed by arrogance and despotism, and his instinct was to withdraw in a contest with haughty authority or brute force, such as Clark rarely used, but used unsparingly if the necessity arose.

"Sir," said Father Gibault, with his dark eyes fixed wistfully on Clark's large immobile face, which he could make as blank and forbidding as a naked cliff, "we have found you to be a humane man. We have been taught for many years that the

American is as savage as the Indian, and that to fall into his hands would be a far worse fate; but we have found it to be false. You have been just, even kind, in your dealings with us, your captives. No! we are not captives; we are brothers, for as such you have treated us!"

During this discourse Clark sat with downcast eyes, but from time to time shot a speculative glance at the priest. The quivering lip, suffusing eye, tremulous tones, convinced him this was not a piece of French acting.

"Sir," Clark said abruptly, "I see you have something weighty on your mind; be pleased to disclose it."

His demand seemed harshly put, in a voice of energetic volume, and in violent contrast to the fine manner of the priest, who started like a horse roughly drawn up by a cutting bit. But he controlled his emotion and complied calmly and collectedly.

"What I, and my friend here, Dr. La Fitte, would suggest is, that you charge us with the duty of bringing our friends on the Ouibache into allegiance with the Americans. Depute it to us, that life may be spared, and much hardship and danger to you be saved."

"How do you propose to accomplish this?" asked Clark, completely surprised, yet interested.

"I will have naught to do with the temporal part. My friend here will manage that; but I can convey such suggestions in a spiritual way as will facilitate the business."

"They are your spiritual charge, and you propose to make your office a means to this end?" observed Clark, musingly, his great sunburned fingers drumming nervously on the table,—the only sign of perturbation he gave.

"Yes!" assented the priest, "what means so potent? They are my people, both spiritually and nationally. Even the Piankeshaws, dwelling across the river in their village, are my converts."

A sneering expression passed over Clark's countenance; for he, in common with all pioneers, believed in the conversion of savages about as he did in that of a skulking wolf.

"In brief, you would coerce by spiritual means; while I would employ lead and gunpowder! Perhaps, in this case, yours is the better way, if it can be done. If not, then mine!" he said positively.

Dr. La Fitte, who had remained silent up to this time, now spoke confidently:—

"It will not fail, colonel! You do not know how the people love our good father. Nor do you know how they hate the British, their contemptuous masters, their hereditary foemen!"

Hitherto La Fitte had not taken part in the conference. Clark turned to him, surveyed him deliberately, and appeared to be convinced as to his integrity. His bearing changed toward both men to something like guarded cordiality, and for a time they conferred earnestly together, Clark asking, they answering questions.

He decided to accept their proffer of help, and, in English, rapidly dictated an order to Lieutenant Gerault; who, when he had turned it into French, read it aloud to the priest and doctor. In the presence of the three it was signed by Clark.

It was an address to the villagers at O Poste, demanding that they take the oath of allegiance to the Americans; and authorizing them to invest the fort with their own militia, which was some two hundred strong; and permitting them to choose from their own number the commandant of the village and post. Thus appealing to their pride and fealty.

"I will make no doubt of their joyful submission," said Father Gibault, "and I will privately direct the whole affair. If it is agreeable to you, I will take this upon myself, aided by my trusted lieutenant, the doctor here."

"Sir, as a Frenchman I have the strongest

faith in your loyalty to the American cause; as a priest, entire confidence in your probity!" Clark observed with solemn earnestness, which, in the light of later proceedings, seemed bombastic. He completed his arrangements with military despatch, and no sooner were they done, than he signified to his guests that the conference was at an end.

When they had retired, he sent for Lancaster, who, on his appearance, found Clark deep in meditation, from which he did not rouse him, but stood waiting for him to speak.

Clark began abruptly, "So, my lad, I cannot prevail upon you to join my army!" with a quizzical smile at its size and his sore need of men.

"Sir, I have already told you that my one thought, the only one I am capable of entertaining, is to find certain news of the fate of my lost sweetheart."

"My boy, I fear the worst awaits you."

"But I *must* know! I cannot give up till I *do* know!" Lancaster's lips set firmly, his eyes stared straight before him as if he saw the terrible end of his quest.

Clark, gazing at him, communed with himself: "Strange, this passion that despoils a man of ambition, of hope, of life! I once felt it briefly,

but a moment of cowardice in the object, ended it for me! A good soldier spoiled! Pity! Pity!"

He looked half angry as he beheld the havoc made in the strong, perfect youth before him, — sunken cheeks; dull eyes; breathing eager and quick, or so slow the lungs all but collapsed; frame lacerated and shrunken, — all for an abstraction called Love! He himself held as hot a passion of another kind, Patriotism; and his ardor was so great, his hate so strong, he saw no obstacle to the capture of the Illinois country, which would add to the glory of Virginia. It was nothing to him that his army was less than two hundred strong, that every post was garrisoned, and that mercenary savages were in ambush everywhere.

"Well, I suppose it is the way of man, but a way I have missed!" he muttered; then said aloud, "My lad, I have a favor to ask of you." Lancaster looked sullenly at him, and Clark laughed, then said:—

"It will not hinder you in this wild business of yours! Nay, it will help you on to the Ouibache, and from there you can more easily follow the Puans to their village under the very walls of the fortress at Detroit. But be sly as

a weasel, brave as a panther, for the *bloody belt has been sent round!*"

Lancaster's gloomy face brightened. "If I can be of use to you, sir, I am always your grateful servant. As to the bloody belt,—how could I think otherwise!"

Clark explained the embassy of Father Gibault and the doctor, and said that he must have a faithful report of their proceedings. On Lancaster's showing irritation at the thought of the delay in again returning to Kaskaskia, Clark cried impatiently:—

"Oh, these lovers! Would to God there were none! They hold but one thought! They spoil good soldiers! You do not know my plan, Lancaster. It is that you never lose sight of the priest and doctor during these negotiations; that you write me a full report, and tuck it secretly in the saddle-bags of Jonathan Poole,—the dullest of fellows,—a guard who will accompany the expedition. I myself will search there for it."

Lancaster gave his promise, then said: "I am sensible, sir, of the honor of your confidence, and if my search end disastrously, I vow to devote the rest of my days to fighting these cursed English! So help me Heaven!"

“ Right spirit, my lad! Come back to me! I have need of men of your mettle! ”

The next morning,—just ten days after the capture of Kaskaskia,—Father Gibault and Dr. La Fitte set out for O Poste with a small retinue, among whom was Lancaster, on a mission whose importance they could not foresee.

CHAPTER XXII

A CHANGE OF ALLEGIANCE

THE two days' journey to O Poste was made safely, under the most favorable conditions. The little convoy was well armed. Even the good father was equipped with a gun, and two pistols were thrust through his rawhide belt, — an unusual addition to his black frock, and much at variance with his pacific character.

The villagers were greatly surprised to see Father Gibault so soon again after his May visitation, — a duty he was accustomed to perform about twice a year, — but they greeted him with incurious pleasure. They supposed he had come on some pressing parochial matter which did not concern them.

The coming of Dr. La Fitte they regarded as a fortuitous circumstance indeed. Every bruised member, every fever, every megrim of whatever kind, was reported to him at once, with moving confidence, as if there were virtue in the very touch of his garments. At other times they

depended on the aged medicine-man of the Pian-keshaws, or on the doubtful services of the herb-doctress and midwife, 'Stasia Lutrell. This chance was too good to be lost!

It was soon noised abroad that there would be matins at the little log church at sun-up the next day. The morning rose fair and beautiful, with that plenitude of sparkling dew and rapturous bird-song sacred to the dawning,—that cool, sweet, purified air, that restful quietude so soon profaned and disquieted by the progress of the hours.

The fervid sun of mid July had hardly returned from its night journey. Its first long, level shafts shot across the asparagus bed, whose bending plumes were overweighted by the scintillating drops that hung on its every filament. It was the glory of Colonel Dubois's dooryard.

Ferriby, who sat at breakfast opposite the open window, could see the humming-bird dive into its dewy bath, and she thought she had never beheld anything more beautiful than the glittering mound of green.

The entire family were at their morning meal, and were disposing of it in silence.

"It is strange that Father Gibault should come in this sudden manner, without notice, I think."

spoke out thoughtless Suzanne, who was listlessly eating her breakfast of grilled venison, bread, and red currants.

Her father, who had secretly indulged in the same opinion, thought it proper to observe loftily, —

“Men of weighty affairs are not in the habit of confiding serious matters to females.”

She made a sly grimace at demure Jeanne across the table, and whispered roguishly to Ferriby at her side: —

“Neither do the females *always* take the males into theirs. Hein?”

“But, father dear, he was here so shortly. Why come again so soon?” Suzanne insisted.

She hit upon the very thing the colonel was most curious to know, but it was beneath his dignity to expose so feminine a weakness before his woman-kind, who happened, at that time, to constitute his entire household. He made no reply.

“Angèle can be baptized,” observed Jeanne, softly.

“True!” cried Monsieur Dubois. “It is well thought, my Jeanne!”

“It will save the soul of another heretic,” she murmured piously.

Ferriby, who comprehended little that was said, knew by that peculiar mental sensitiveness with which women are endowed, that she was the subject of their conversation; moreover she had caught the name "Angèle" which they had given her when she first became an inmate of their home.

As yet nothing had been learned of her parentage, nor anything of her former life. She was a nameless, homeless waif of the Great Wilderness. She had roused from her long stupor with a memory blank as a new-born babe's, and while mentality was strengthening daily, this lapse had not been bridged. Father Gibault and the doctor had warned them not to hurry its development, as it might, in her weak state, end in the permanent overthrow of reason. As both brain and body had been exhausted to a point not far from death, she must, like a babe, grow gradually into both mental and physical strength.

In the last few weeks they had commenced to teach her like a little child, and she had picked up rapidly the meaning of commonly used words from the chatter of Suzanne and Jeanne, her new name among them.

Proud indeed were the demoiselles of their charge, when, about a week since, she was well

enough to appear at table with the family, and could hesitatingly speak their names, as well as "père," to monsieur, their father; and "maman," to madame, their mother.

Her whole nature was expanding slowly, much as a sensitive plant erects each foliole after rough handling, to at last become strong and symmetrical as before.

But at times lassitude would weigh her down, as if all the strength meant for a long life had been consumed in those fearful days of wandering. Sometimes she would steal away to the garden-seat, and ponder alone, in piteous effort to recall—what? She could not tell—a natant something that troubled her and made her uneasy.

She would sink into moods of apathy from which nothing roused her till they had run their course. Her high courage and noble spirit were gone; she was as dependent as a child.

The shrill shouts of the boys in the great pasture, tending the cows, threw her into an alarm she could not control nor explain. Suzanne tried by every light, gay frolic she could devise to hearten her; and Jeanne, by tenderest sympathy, to soothe her, until they awakened feelings of gratitude and trust to reward their efforts; and

they were encouraged to believe in her ultimate return to her normal state.

By seven o'clock the entire family were on their way to mass, except Angèle, who was thought too feeble to go. The stillness of the morning was so unbroken it seemed as if Nature was bent on hearing the orisons of these good people who eagerly sought the little church to engage in their devotions. Their joy in it was moving, so far from storied minster or imposing cathedral, which are in themselves an inspiration to worship. The church stood east of the fort and in front of it, only a few yards from the heavy puncheon gates. On the flagstaff of Sackville flew the British flag, and in the score of years it had waved above them it had never become a grateful sight to these Frenchmen.

The little building was made of hewn timbers set on end. There were no windows in it, and a door at either end always stood open to let in daylight. Its roof was of clapboards; its floor of earth; its seats, few in number, were of heavy slabs, supported on pegs driven into the ground. There was no way of heating, and it was rarely used in winter, as the road was impassable between Kaskaskia and O Poste. As soon as might be, the faithful priest came to them in the

spring. He longed for the time when the *donné* would in some measure be a spiritual shepherd to them.

On this radiant July morning the sun flooded the little edifice, and lit the interior so brightly that the two candles were dimmed on the smooth block of wood cut from a forest tree which served for an altar. At the church door stood sentries. Within, Father Gibault was ready to conduct the service, clad in the plain black robe of his order, with no glittering canonicals, no lace vestments, no embroidered cope, to enrich the scene. He was a humble paraphrast for Jesu the Christ, not a richly dressed puppet. Only one acolyte attended him, Gaston Bevard, who ministered sullenly and perfunctorily.

"He hath a devil!" murmured Manette Taché, pausing in her devotions to watch the priest's pupil. "Is he not part savage? Yes; I will pray the more for him!" and she diligently resumed her prayers.

Hark! the sonorous Latin of the monks peals out with as grand simplicity, as deep solemnity in this humble sunlit sanctuary as in the long, dim, vaulted vistas of St. Peter's.

"Ave, Maria, gratia plena ; Dominus tecum :
benedicta tu in mulieribus,

et benedictus fructus ventris tui,
Jesus. Sancta Maria, Mater Dei, ora pro nobis
peccatoribus, nunc et in hora mortis nostræ. Amen."

It rolls in dulcet syllables across the prairie till lost in the hum of insect life; it is borne to the dark forest by the warm breeze to fall silent among the murmuring of cool leaves. Who may know how potent for good this ministry? — how far these faint tones reached?

Lancaster, mindful of his trust, found an obscure coign of vantage, and looked on in surprise at the simple earnestness and joy of these people at the chance of taking part in the rites of their religion.

The service had proceeded in pious solemnity to its close. The benediction had been said; the congregation stirred cheerfully to depart, when Father Gibault by a gesture commanded their attention. He stepped to the floor below the rude altar and requested silence.

"My children," he said, "I would have a few words with you before you depart to your homes. You well know that sixteen years ago you resigned allegiance to our most gracious and sovereign majesty Louis XV; since then we have lived under the rule of the king of England. Now there is another authority, which, if you will,

may be set over you. It is concerning this our good doctor would have your attention."

There was a rustling of re-seating, and all eyes were fastened on La Fitte, who came to Father Gibault's side, and at once began speaking:—

"My good friends and compatriots: What our reverend father says is true, and he himself heartily indorses what I would tell you. Is it not so?" he said, turning to the priest. Father Gibault nodded an assent, gravely, from the bench where he had seated himself. His habitually eager face was set in serious, even austere, lines. His dark eyes watched his people as if to note each fluctuation of feeling, each change of opinion, as it passed over their mobile faces. His cheeks, pale and hollow, grew paler with the gravity of the issue. His flock were emotional, readily responsive, as none knew better than himself, and if the wrong chord were struck, dissonance, harsh and brutal, would result.

Dr. La Fitte seemingly felt that a great responsibility lay upon him, that the outcome would be determined by the subtlety and power of his plea; and for an instant he paused as if seeking for a telling opening sentence. He began where the priest left off:—

"Yes; the flag of our fathers no longer floats over their children; but that of aliens, never friendly!" The men's faces showed surprise, and something of consternation.

"But now, by the blessing of God, we will change all that." Then he rapidly told them of the capture of Kaskaskia, Cahokia, and Prairie du Rocher, by the handful of Virginians under Clark; and how the Americans, now waging war against the British, were meeting with success at arms. "For Burgoyne surrendered in October, now nearly a year past."

This news they heard for the first time, and it caused a sensation. Men turned and looked at each other.

"Now," continued the speaker, "the Virginians ask you to join them in this fight for liberty, not as aliens, not as subjects, but as citizens! Sharing in all their privileges, and with the right to govern yourselves. Our beloved religion, Colonel Clark has said, would be defended from insult. And under the laws of Virginia, to which this vast Illinois country will be attached, yours will be the rights and privileges of freemen. Declare yourselves, once for all. Be no longer humble captives, but free men. Swear your allegiance to this new republic, that

will make you free citizens, which, as there is a God in heaven, is coming — is *here!*”

The excitement grew steadily as the speech reached the climax. Men sprang to their feet. They questioned each other silently, with earnest looks. Like a stone at the turn of the hilltop, they needed but a start to crash through all impediments to new ground. Only a few held back timidly. A voice from the crowd — that potent voice from a crowd — asked: —

“Father Gibault, do you sanction this?”

“I do,” answered the priest, firmly, rising to his feet. “And I invoke the blessing of the good God and all his saints upon every one who has the courage to swear allegiance to the Americans on the Holy Book; and I absolve them from their oath to the English king.”

He held his missal aloft. For one instant of tremendous feeling, of utter stillness, when men’s hearts beat loud, their eyes burned, their lips dried, they waited. The next, and Colonel Dubois went forward to take the oath; then the people pushed and crowded each other, in their eagerness to follow.

Lancaster beheld this scene but little moved; for no enthusiasm was hot enough to melt his frozen melancholy; but he gave a conscientious report of it to Clark in his despatch.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE APPARITION

IMMEDIATELY after the dismissal of the congregation, Father Gibault made use of the opportunity to call a meeting of the men at the tavern to discuss the generous measures of Clark; chief articles of which were, that they select a commandant, and garrison the post with the local militia.

Without a moment's consideration of the results of their defection from the king, braced for the deed by the good father's absolution, they lost no time in making their choice. It fell upon Monsieur Dubois, and the office invested him with the highest authority, both civil and military. This business happily over, Father Gibault, Dr. La Fitte, and Colonel Dubois left them,—a company of some two hundred men,—roused to the highest pitch of excitement, pledging fealty to the Americans; to the new flag of the colonies (which would soon replace the British colors, when Clark should arrive, or

some officer delegated by him to take command of the fort); to the governor of Virginia; to anything for an excuse for a toast and a huge dram of taffia.

These three gentlemen retired to the home of Colonel Dubois, where they held a private consultation. There never was a mob, however violent, nor a crowd, however orderly, that were not the puppets of two or three string-pullers, who, when all is set in motion to their liking, slip away to watch their antics quietly and enjoy results ultimately.

Colonel Dubois showed his guests into the grande chambre. The adjoining room, unconnected by door, was the cabinet which Ferriby still occupied, not having sufficient strength to climb the stairway, and share the apartments of the demoiselles Dubois. She had spent many hours of weakness and depression on the low couch opposite the open window, which looked out over the same stretch of grass that the parlor window commanded. The two were set very close together, so that an immense Guelder-rose bush that grew between shaded both. Its restless twigs tapped mysteriously on the window-panes, when the sash was down, and flaunted inquisitively into the room, as now, when

it was raised. It formed an arching bower that screened her from the scorching rays of the sun, and let the air through, blandly cooled by its foliage. On the other side of the casement clambered a Noisette rose which, in flowering-time, scented the apartment sweetly.

Jeanne was reading aloud to Ferriby from the life of Saint Geneviève, more to soothe than to edify her, for her knowledge was too limited to comprehend much of the smooth French; but it quieted her to hear Jeanne's soft monotone. In the pauses when the reader stopped to spell out some hard word, the low, gentle tones of the priest could be heard from the adjoining room, or a cautious reply from the doctor or Monsieur Dubois. These murmurs went on for half an hour, then ceased altogether.

Suddenly there was some sort of movement in the hall just without Ferriby's door. It was opened gently, and Father Gibault entered, followed by Dr. La Fitte, Monsieur and Madame Dubois, and the two girls, Élise and Suzanne.

Ferriby lay back in a deep chair, dressed in a simple gown of pure white, with the Virgin's color showing in knots of ribbon on it here and there. Her hair, much of which had been sacrificed, so matted had it become, was hidden away under a

thin, white lawn cap. Her eyes, as startled as a doe's, glinting with nervous lights, seemed darker and larger, sunken deep in their sockets. The brown of her forest life had faded and left her face pallid as a fall of new snow. The red had vanished from her lips, leaving them tinged with faintest purple. Her cheeks were so thinned as to almost show the form of her teeth behind the wasted flesh. Compared to what she had been, she was a ghastly object, stripped of beauty, of youth, of the flesh of her bones; she was a mere skeleton with breath in it. Her aspect was so changed from the spirited girl of rounded contours, vermilled cheeks, flashing eyes, and buoyant step, who parted from her lover in the clearing, that none who knew her then would at the first glance recognize her now.

Beholding her, the old impious cry would rise to the lips, "If there be an Omnipotent Power, a Beneficent Spirit, why do such calamities come upon the innocent?"

She looked at the strangers with that visible shrinking now habitual to her; for she had no recollection of Father Gibault. He and Monsieur Dubois approached her side. The latter carried a silver bowl half full of fair water. The priest held in his hand a missal, with a finger inserted

between its leaves. For Father Gibault, ever mindful of his first duty, — the saving of heretics by bringing them into the bosom of the true church, — had taken this opportunity to baptize the flotsam of the great Ouibache. Colonel Dubois stood godfather, and madame, godmother. When the name was demanded, Jeanne whispered to her father “Angèle Dubois,” and thus she was christened.

When the drops of water ran down her face, Ferriby lifted her eyes to the priest’s countenance and smiled faintly upon him with the brief, touching loveliness that marks the smile of a sleeping babe, upon which the doting nurse declares it sees angels. It was so moving, on her wan face, that tears of tender sympathy suffused Father Gibault’s eyes. She sat opposite the open window in the strong morning light. As her eyes fell from the priest’s face they travelled idly across this open space, and for an instant stared in such fixity of horror as to make the flesh creep of those who watched her. She gave one loud shriek and buried her face on Jeanne’s bosom. Jeanne pacified her like a child, and asked soothingly and composedly: —

“What is it my angel? Tell your friend!” — as if this outbreak were no unusual occurrence.

"His spirit! his spirit! Oh so pale! He is dead!"

It was but a fitful flash of memory; for when urged further, she could tell nothing, only trembled with fear.

Father Gibault was much startled, and asked with great concern, —

"Is she affected thus often, Jeanne?"

"Yes, father, but never before in the daytime. Often at night in her dreams she sees terrible things, and rouses and screams. But I soothe and coax her into quiet again."

She tenderly pressed the girl's head to her breast, and patted her shoulder gently till the long shudders subsided.

"Poor little one! she must have suffered some frightful calamity! Is this torpor of brain under which she labors common to highly strung women?" the priest asked of the doctor, who stood looking on with calm professional interest.

"No; not common. Such cases have been met with; but among the sturdy pioneer women such complete exhaustion of nervous force is rare. She must have undergone terrible experiences indeed to so reduce her, of which fatigue is least!"

"Can you do nothing for her?" asked madame, appealingly.

“No; there is nothing better than young, cheerful society to rouse her. Get her to dancing as soon as she has strength. Keep her in sunshine mentally and physically, and the good God, if such be his intention, will make her whole again. If not, then man *may* not.”

Dr. La Fitte gently lifted the hidden face, and gazed into the eyes darkly blue, with the pupils widely stretched by terror, and saw within the dancing, flashing lights that point toward insanity.

When the three men, Father Gibault, Dr. La Fitte, and Colonel Dubois, had slipped away from the jubilant, almost riotous, company at the tavern, they had been followed by Clark's spy. Without difficulty Lancaster managed to hide himself under the green bower made by the Guelder-rose, in accordance with his promise not to lose any secrets they might have. In his trafficking among the villagers in the Illinois country, he had picked up a patois of trading French, which he comprehended well as he spoke it ill. This fact, coming to the knowledge of Clark, had been one of the chief reasons why he had been chosen for this delicate mission. He was, too, the only man in the guard who

could write, and had wit enough to perform such a task. As he was not an enlisted man, he could not be compelled to return, and it was therefore agreed he should write a full report and secrete it in Poole's saddle-bags as Clark had suggested, that he might not be hindered on his long journey to Detroit, where, he had definitely learned while in O Poste, the Puans had gone.

Lancaster had overheard every word of their harmless conference, but when they retired to the other room, his wonder was excited, and he managed to get a peep into the interior. What he saw there moved his heart with pity. The dying girl, as he supposed her to be, recalled to him the tender maid he sought, who might at that moment be enduring torture, or worse, among the savages, and his soul was inflamed with passionate rage. With inexplicable emotion he stared through the window, recklessly and intently, during the baptismal rite, which meant little to him. Grief filled his eyes with tears; pain tore at his heart; savage plans for revenge burned in his brain. So absorbed did he become as the ceremony proceeded, that he was lost to caution, and leaned nearer and nearer the window, and only escaped discovery because the interest of those within was centred on the girl.

He lost his cap, and after stooping to regain it, rose upright before the window at the moment Ferriby's eyes fell upon it.

So dull are our senses, so feeble our spiritual vision, so in thrall to the flesh, that one more mortal "comprehended not." The whips of nature lashed Lancaster into a passion of pain at her cry, but could not drive him to recognition. That night he proceeded on his journey to the far north, heavy of heart, weighed down in spirit with premonitions of failure.

CHAPTER XXIV

A QUIET INTERVAL

AFTER the conquest of the four little French towns, they constituted a sort of republic under the rule of a single person, — Clark, — who held no other commission than that of an officer of the troops of Virginia. Encouraged by his success here, he entertained the bold design of attacking Detroit; and he appealed again and again to the governor of Virginia for soldiers, but his excellency was too deeply engaged in the Revolution of the colonies to spare either men or money. Clark looked each day for the enemy to fall upon him and destroy him. Inaction was maddening to him who had sipped the wine of victory — alas! only to create a hotter thirst. He had no recourse but to submit.

The Indians, however, were actively carrying on relentless border-war. The American pioneers fled to the nearest stockades, and their empty cabins told the story of cruelty which will forever brand with shame the name of Henry Hamilton.

If Clark and the pioneers were troubled, not so the Frenchman. He had changed his allegiance so often that it had become a matter of indifference to him to whom nominally he owed allegiance. Secretly he was unswervingly loyal to his king, Louis of France. But there were among them some who were actively aggressive. Rochblave, the deposed commandant, was one. He made the roving bands of savages his agents to bear the news of the fall of the French towns to Detroit, where Hamilton was in command.

Monsieur Dubois administered his office leniently, and was not too superior to his neighbors, who would have laughed good-humoredly at any assumption of loftiness on his part. In his home the days of summer had passed with pleasant swift-ness. The adopted child had become one of them, tenderly loved and cared for by all save Élise, who never threw off her haughty coldness toward Angèle — as she was called now altogether. Nor was Élise, in truth, any too agreeable to her own blood.

The affairs at the fort — renamed Patrick Henry — went well under Captain Helm. Big and good-natured he ruled his little garrison laxly, and was on the best of terms with all the villagers. There were no near disturbances from the Indians,

and time passed in placid dulness. The villagers observed their constantly recurring fêtes, and passed over the fast days in easy oversight.

St. Vrain was gone from the village the greater part of the summer and was sadly missed on these festive occasions. Frequent and fervent were the wishes for his return.

Ferriby took little part in these festivals although, plastic as new clay, which to all intents she was, — her past life under bond to oblivion, — she was fast becoming a French demoiselle in speech and manner. Yet there were mute protests of nature which tried to break through her mental apathy: she could not join the dance with the abandon of Suzanne; nor attend on the worship of the little church, on the rare occasions that Father Gibault came, with the devotional ardor of Jeanne; she felt burdened by the forms and ceremonies which Élise would have imposed on the household but for their concerted rebellion. Every day her mind expanded and revived save in the faculty of memory. Warned by the priest and doctor, none dared try to awaken it from its intervital state. They sometimes hoped it might never be.

Ferriby could now chatter easily the very good French spoken in the colonel's family; could

dance with more grace than Suzanne, if not with the energy. She could tell her beads with humility, but with a faint aversion, an ancestral antipathy from Scotch Presbyterian forebears. Her beauty had returned, spiritualized; her hair had grown long again, but of somewhat darker color; her wasted figure had rounded into softer contours; but there was a listlessness about her yet which told of a lack of vitality. She joined her foster-sisters in all their pastimes, and now in the serene close of summer looked forward to the cider making, grape gatherings, and nuttings with interest, in which all the villagers, old and young, joined with hearty enjoyment.

There was one creature who disturbed her and roused her distrust, — the *donné*! Ah-mah-nac-o she had forgotten as part of her old life. Gaston had a singular persistence in finding her out when alone. No sooner had Jeanne, the faithful, disappeared than he arose, as if by magic, at her side. He troubled her with menaces for which she could find no reason. She now understood what his destiny was to be, and while she half pitied, she wholly distrusted him, and knew the words he spoke to her so wildly and secretly were not in keeping with the character of the future monk or priest, as he himself might elect. His hatred of

St. Vrain was furiously unreasonable, and, to her, incomprehensible; and he never failed to offer intangible insult to the coureur, who esteemed him beneath his notice.

“He is but a half-bred cur that one good kick would settle!” said Hilaire, contemptuously.

St. Vrain still hovered about Ferriby, abashed at heart as he never thought to be, but more audacious than ever to the other demoiselles in her presence. He felt for her a reverence bordering on adoration, but would as soon have thought of making love to Saint Margaret herself. Jealousy never troubled him, for he felt that the girl's heart was as free from passion as the lovely figure of the Blessed Virgin in the cathedral at Quebec.

His feeling, thus checked, did not overstep the bounds of ardent devotion, though it would have flamed into violent passion had the girl been less cold. He never failed to see her on his return from his various missions, and left her presence each time groaning in spirit over his own curious, unconquerable abashment and her artless gratitude.

St. Vrain had been away so long on his last journey to Detroit that he was now daily, even hourly, looked for. Suzanne, whose bon camarade he was, openly expressed the hope he

would return in time for the cider making, which would be on the coming Thursday, the last day of September.

Happy and light hearted, the villagers lived for the present day, and borrowed no trouble for the next.

CHAPTER XXV

THE CIDER MAKING

THE hot early days of September had gone, the frost-tempered mornings and evenings had come, delicately tinting the foliage of garden plants, turning the great leaves of the paw-paws to golden ovals, spotting its odorous fruit to purple ripeness, so loved of the connoisseur; and mellowing the apples in the orchard in the fumacious atmosphere of autumn. It was time for the cider making,—a day of general jollity in which the whole village joined.

St. Vrain had laughingly promised to return in time for it, but he had not yet appeared, though the sun was two hours high, and the boys and girls were already busy in the orchard, gathering the cool fragrant apples; the boys in the trees, the girls picking them up from the ground, and putting them into carts between the pauses of the vigorous shaking,—a bruise more or less did not count in cider making.

Nearly every garden plot had a few apple trees,

and many families had good-sized orchards, stretching in long straight rows. A pretty sight they were, the red apples gleaming from out the dull leafage, the last to fall in the autumn, tenderly cherishing the fruit from the first hard little bullet up to the great scarlet sphere; through the blasting chill of the leaf-cold, through the long drought and scalding heat of August, into the rapid maturing night-chill and day-fervor of September, till now the most exquisite of all juices and flavors Nature stores away in her fruitage was ready to express into delicious cider.

It was one of September's blue-swathed days through which the sunlight filtered in aureate shimmering. The air was a-quiver with tempered heat, sumachs were blazing on the low hills to the east; the maples were ruddy and golden, and shone out insistently from among the black-green of the oaks in the forest topping the shallow heights. Content and regret filled those who had a sensitive soul for beauty, — who, truth to tell, were few enough in that jocund company, — content with the present loveliness; regret at its fugitiveness.

The clumsy wooden press was set up in the corner of Monsieur Bosseron's orchard, shaded by a group of pines that grew in exile there. His was the largest yield of fruit, next to Colonel

Dubois's, — where the fête had been held the previous year, — therefore it was manifestly the proper place to hold it this season. The cider was portioned out among them according to each man's contribution of fruit; and a generous portion was reserved for those who had none. A devouring hopper of split oak scantlings received the loads of apples. The big arm of the press, creaking loud, was turned by a patient ox, and crunched from them their sweet juices. The turgid fluid poured in a steady stream from the spills into a large trough made of a hollowed-out tree trunk.

The air was saturated with a tart effluence that set one slavering. Piles of brown pomace began to mount near the press, which the irritable, yellow-striped bees sucked at with all the delight of a toper in his cups, for once satiated into good-humor. They carried to the hive such store of sweets the very drones hummed busily.

Loud laughter from the youths and maidens; shrill screams when some apple, dropped with sly intent, cracked its victim smartly on the head; threats and counter-threats passing between the pickers of opposite sexes; the humming of the bees; the groaning of the press combined in cheerful commotion.

Ferriby, or Angèle, as she was now universally called, sat apart on a bench under a pear tree, near 'Sieur Bosseron's beehives. She listened with bland pleasure to the murmur of the tiny laborers, and lost sight of her surroundings till she was recalled by St. Vrain's robust voice joyously shouting, "Ma foi! For once I have good fortune!" On all sides a clamor of welcome arose, and a brisk fire of questions.

"Hold! hold! You would flood me with questions worse than the waters of the Ouibache over the Drowned Lands!" cried the coureur. "I may not say where I've been, nor why. But I *can* say that I am rejoiced to be with you again; and by all that's lucky, at cider making!"

From hither and yon the young people flocked to greet him, and while he was thus engaged Gaston Bevard came into the orchard unnoticed from an opposite quarter. His path led him past Ferriby's seat, and he paused and spoke to her. His abrupt manner, and the wild flash of hate from his dark eye, which had found out the coureur, frightened her, but she gently responded to his salutation.

"I had hoped to see you once alone! free from the presence of that bête noir!" he said bitterly. "I have long determined to tell you —"

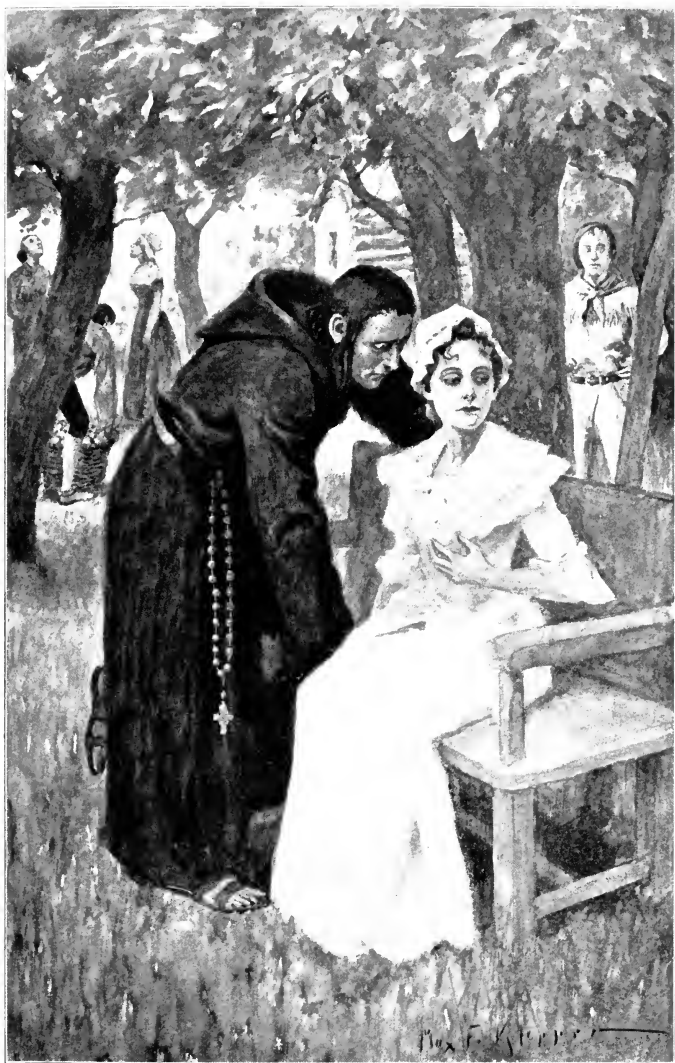
Ferriby rose quickly and would have left him, but he grasped her wrist, and forced her down on the bench again, — an action none noticed, so engaged with the coureur were they; even the creak of the press was silent.

“No! no!” entreated Ferriby, in a panic, “tell me nothing!”

“But I will!” he cried violently. “I am no Frenchman to fawn at women’s feet; nor am I English to treat them with mock chivalry. I am all savage! And I want, and will have, the woman I choose! — You!”

Ferriby shrank from him and tried to free herself, but he held her fast and leaned over her, devouring her with a fierce gaze. His usually impassive face was quivering with passion, which revolted and terrified her, and she would have screamed, but his long slender hand fell upon her lips.

“It is best to listen quietly; for hear me you must! You love the forest, the quiet life among the trees, — I’ve watched you often, and I know! — the broad sky, the flow of the river, the freedom to wander at will. I, too, love them all — all!” he cried with passionate fervor. “What are the white man’s narrow life and cold religion to me? I am Indian, — all Indian! My white father cared



“ ‘I want, and will have, the woman I choose.’ ”



no more for me than the he-wolf for its cub! He cast my mother off and forgot me! The wilderness calls me with the far voices of my ancestors. I will go to the forest many, many leagues from here, and you shall go with me! There I shall forget my cursed white blood. There I will no more be scorned for my mother's blood. Her fate she could not help! Curses on them, one and all, those pale usurpers!"

A mixture of hate and rage distorted his handsome features, and he uttered imprecations scarcely above a whisper. His mood was the more frightful for its repression. Ferriby gazed into his face, so spellbound by his fury that she could now neither scream nor move if she would.

"This night I will go, and you will go with me!"

"Father Gibault — the church —" she stammered thickly.

"To the hell of the white man with both! The gods of the forest and stream are mine! I hate the canting goodness of the priest, the narrow bounds of the church! The God I would have is he whose habitation is in the vastness of the forest; whose voice in gentleness whispers among the tender leaves in spring, murmurs in the low waters; in anger, thunders from the clouds, and

roars from the mighty winds! This puny white man's God! Ugh! I'll have none of him!"

All the pent-up mutiny of his soul had burst bounds and rushed forth untrammelled.

Ferriby still gazed into his passion-kindled face, while fear of him widened the pupils of her eyes, and made her face pale.

Suddenly he looked with inexpressible hate toward the crowd about St. Vrain. His glance removed, the spell snapped, Ferriby could speak.

"I cannot go! Loose me!" she pleaded in a low voice.

He turned to her fully again; his reply was fierce and loud:—

"Go you shall! I swear it by the Manitou of my mother's tribe, and by the unpitying God of your race! Go you shall!"

"Go? Yes; by all means, ma'm'selle, while the cider runs clearest. But why, Gaston, roar so ordinary a request?"

St. Vrain smiled with devilish maliciousness and unveiled mockery, which maddened the donné, who, frenzied, would have dragged the girl to her feet and fled with her then.

"Savage fool! Loose the girl, or, by Heaven, you'll bite the earth!"

The two men stared steadily at each other like

a pair of fierce catamounts, tensely ready to spring, when Ferriby's voice caused them to fall back a step.

"Don't! oh, don't!" she cried. "*Both* leave me!"

St. Vrain turned his back upon the *donné*, strong contempt in the very act, and said:—
"Pardon, *ma'm'selle*! You are right! This is not the place for a quarrel. May I conduct you to your sisters?"

She arose with such swift alacrity that Bevard scowled; they walked away, leaving him looking malignantly after them.

"Say nothing!" murmured Ferriby to the *coureur*.

"As you command, *ma'm'selle*!" he replied.

All day long the cider-mill groaned; all day long the boys and girls frolicked. The great hogsheads frothed to the brim. The last apple had been gathered. The youths and maidens were now dancing, weaving in and out, falling into figures like bits of glass in a kaleidoscope, then were as suddenly separated and as formless. The dance was done. They moved off in groups and couples to slake their thirst. Pewter mugs brimming with the liquor passed from hand to

hand, and it was sipped daintily or swallowed in great gulps. Ferriby and St. Vrain stood together. He had unobtrusively watched over her since her encounter of the morning, with Bevard. They stood aloof from the jostling, laughing crowd, awaiting a quiet chance, when they saw Gaston approaching them. He bore in either hand a mug of cider, bubbled like opals. The third and fourth fingers of his right hand were pressed close under the palm, a cup was held in the others. He paused, and, with an attempt at graciousness, said, —

“M’am’selle Angèle, will you and Monsieur, the Coureur, drink with me as a token of pardon for my offences of the morning?”

“With all the pleasure in life,” agreed St. Vrain, heartily, before Ferriby could answer. And he relieved Gaston of the cup in his right hand, and turned to present it to her. Instead of looking at St. Vrain she regarded Bevard with the same fascinated gaze of the morning, and she saw his right hand raised, as if to brush back a long lock that had fallen over his forehead. As it swept over the cup destined for St. Vrain, his folded fingers straightened. The sun shone in broad slanting rays, as it was fast declining, and in the shining light she saw a fine dust, like motes, sift down

into the cider. She leaned forward to take the mug from St. Vrain and lurched, as if her foot had rolled upon a pebble, against the *donné*, knocking the cup he held from his hand.

He stared with undisguised ferocity at the girl, and her face lost every vestige of color except for the black horror of her eyes. St. Vrain looked from one to the other, guessed shrewdly, dashed the cider into Gaston's face, and said with infinite contempt:—

“Would you? Untamed savage!”

He seized Ferriby's arm and almost dragged her away.

Old Mous-wah's banewort had been wasted!

CHAPTER XXVI

THE GRAPE GATHERING

THE forest had decked itself in its gaudiest coloring, crimson and yellow flashed from masses of green and brown. In the river bottoms the purple grapes, dulled by an exquisite bloom, were bursting with juices. The wild bees were already stabbing them, token that it was fully time to gather them for the wine making. The place where they grew thickest, a low terrace on the river, five or six miles south of O Poste, was the spot fixed upon by the villagers for the annual grape gathering.

A motley collection of water craft lay on the river, jarring against each other, pulling at their ropes like restive horses, tossing like cockle-shell by the force of the current, just under the palisades of the fort. The low bank on the opposite shore was filled with Indians watching the embarkation; for nearly the whole town would be of the company. A guard at the post and a few feeble folk would be left behind.

It was mid October. The frost, which had held off wonderfully, had touched but lightly with its searing chill the maples and sweet gum, so that they glowed brilliantly; the leathery ovals of the paw-paws were golden in the bottoms. "Good-by-to-summer" lent to the passing of autumn its lovely milk-blue bloom in airy clusters. Near by nodded the stately milkweed whose gay pink pompons of florets had turned to silvery filaments bursting from pale green pods shaped like little canoes, which were casting abroad on gossamer wings scalelike seeds. The fuzzy brown tops of the ironweed — but a little while ago flaunting the kingly color — showered its motile harvest. All blent in motley.

The villagers came from every direction, — the young maidens bearing dainty baskets woven of withes from the willows now tossing slim arms jauntily, as if bidding them bon voyage; the elder women carrying large substantial ones of hickory splints, which the Indians made so deftly, and which would hold all of a bushel.

As is the rule with crowds, the first comers, though tarrying late, shortly drew the others, and very soon the whole company had gathered and were aboard the batteaux; canoes — safe for one, doubtful, but altogether delightful, for two — and

cunning little pirogues that snugly held a couple, by some strange ordering of chance, of opposite sexes.

Even the *donné* was present, and sat apart, morose and silent, as if waiting for some one. Not far off the lively voice of the *coureur* was heard chaffing a lover and his lass who had skillfully eluded the family *batteau*, and shipped together in the frailest of crafts.

St. Vrain was bubbling over with liveliness, but he was not too much engaged to keep an eye on Gaston, and knew by instinct why he waited so moodily.

"No, no, my friend," he said to himself, "I think a birch-bark canoe fitter for so fair a passenger than that clumsy tree trunk of thine! Trust St. Vrain to give passage to the fairest *voyageur* afloat this morning!"

Only one *batteau*, rather better than the others, remained to be laden. The company waited with a little impatience for its passengers to arrive. They had hardly expressed their wonder at the delay, and guessed at the reason, when the delinquents appeared down the dusty cart-track, — *père*, *mère*, and *demoiselles* Dubois in holiday humor.

Monsieur was condescending and stately, for he could not quite forget his position; madame

was flushed with hurry; Élise, cold and rather scorning it all; Jeanne, disrelishing and shrinking from the loud jollity, to which new impetus was given by their appearance; Suzanne, cheerful and gay as the cricket that chirruped in the grass, enjoying all with the fervor of youth. Lastly came Angèle, listless and dreamy, as if she saw the scene through a maze, which she tried to brush aside as she did the long glistening webs floating everywhere in the moist air.

"What! Gaston Bevard did leave his books long enough to go on so worldly an outing!" exclaimed Suzanne, as she saw him rapidly haul in his log canoe to the river's margin, in the hope, as she had divined, of having Angèle for a passenger, and of touching her hand as he helped her into the rocking boat. Small reverence had saucy Suzanne for the priest's pupil, and little confidence in his piety.

"It is not forbidden a *donné* to gather grapes, *ma'm'selle*," he said sullenly.

"No; 'nor figs from thistles,' if he can," she retorted quickly, and with such significance his brown cheek reddened, and his oddly changing eyes flashed fire upon her. "But he will be sadly pricked if he try, and get nothing more for his pains!" she persisted.

St. Vrain, too, had approached, and smiled broadly at Suzanne's audacious moralizing, and with a dexterous pull brought his light birch bark ashore just as madame attempted to board the batteau and lurched forward, barely missing a fall. With a bound he was aboard it and, before the eyes of the chagrined donné, assisted all the ladies of the commandant's household to their places.

Monsieur Dubois's batteau was manned by six stout panis, and soon shot out mid-stream, then all the rest followed in an irregular line.

It was a morning of exquisite qualities, mist-wrapped, sweet-breathed. The sun had scarcely risen above the first tier of low hills far to the east, and the azure haze of Indian summer wrapped the earth tenderly. In the great blue sky little white clouds floated lightly as owls' feathers. The air, exhilarating by the slight frost overnight, was odorous with bitter incense of the dying foliage. Far to the west stretched the still prairie, and at the remotest skyline moving dots told of grazing buffalo. As the fleet passed on its way, the blue cranes rose in flight with a harsh cry, disturbed in their sedgy solitudes. Now and then a great pike, intent on getting his breakfast, leaped high at a dragon-fly, missed his aim, and

fell floundering into some boat, whereupon burst out loud girlish screams.

In a little more than an hour the company reached their destination, — a flat stretch of bottom-land, opposite where a little creek joined the Ouibache.

Long before they arrived at the spot, the moist southern breeze effumed a winey tincture from nature's own vintry. It acted on them like new wine. The spirits of the young grew riotous; and the slow blood of the elders was pleasantly stirred. The coureur broke into Bacchic chanson: —

“The grape, the grape ! It gives us wine,
It gives us love, it gives us joy,
And to the soldier courage brings,
To die, to die !

“Then sing, then sing the praise of wine
That cheers us in our hours of pain,
And bids the heart that longs for death,
To live, to live !”

They quickly made a landing and mounted the shallow bank to the higher grounds, where the grapes grew thickest; it was a narrow stretch like the top of a terrace. At one time the stream had evidently held its course there, and had receded into its present channel. Tokens that it

had tried to claim its own again, were found in great limbs lodged in unlikely places, and in piles of drift-wood stayed by tough shrubs. Back of this plateau the hills sprang steep and high, dusky and sombre in the shadowing of pines and balsam firs, carpeted thick by variegated mosses, beautified by vines and ferns.

Suzanne, in wild spirits, made a dash for the highest hilltop, followed by a half-score of her mates. They toiled and panted, slipped and struggled up the steep sides, the girls helped by the strong, eager youths, glad of the chance to be so near to the coy maidens who ordinarily held them at arm's length. Many a sturdy arm circled many a coveted waist; many a large tanned hand clasped a little browned one, with a great thump of joy at the heart of the lad whose members happened to be thus happily placed. Their progress was dilatory for more than one reason, but at last the summit was gained.

Angèle arrived tardily. She was attended on either hand by Gaston and St. Vrain, much to her distress; for she wished the company of neither, especially in their present mood — one of bitter sullenness on the part of the *donné*, and of biting malice on that of the *coureur*. Between the two she suffered as many another woman has,

without any tangible means of putting an end to the situation. She was not a coquette, with that wilful creature's enjoyment of such rivalry. If she took notice, it would imply undue vanity; she must endure in silence.

Before them spread a scene of enchanting beauty. The stately, solemn river lay glittering under the morning sun. On the opposite shore the low hills followed the sinuous stream, verdant with the second growth of luxurious grasses that spring up after the October rains in this plenteous land, pied with the garish tints of autumn foliage. Mellow sunlight lay over all, and dispersed the film of blue vapor, banishing it to the far distance, where, quivering, it hung, shutting off the vista. Even these thoughtless young people were awed into silence. Their chatter ceased. As they gazed, its pensive spell caught them, and they felt the deep yearning for the Great Mother which comes over her children in her solitudes.

All at once the charm was broken by the jocund coureur.

"Men and maidens all," he cried, "who's for a race down this hill, the goal to be that clump of paw-paws?"

He stood below them on a little level space, and pointed down a steep, smooth slope, which

ended within a few paces of the river's brink. It instantly caught their fancy.

They clambered down where he stood. At a wave of his cap they were off, except three, — Gaston, Jeanne, and Angèle, — who watched their flight as they rushed on with ever increasing velocity, seemingly unable to control their speed.

Ferriby's eyes brightened with sudden and unusual pleasure. The wild sport seemed to waken some latent memory. She laughed softly and clapped her hands, and before Jeanne could grasp her intention, or clutch a fold of her gown, she, too, was off fleetly as a doe! Jeanne, fearful for her, rushed after to catch her. But Ferriby, who had enjoyed many a mad race with her little brother, was as sure-footed as she was fleet, and reached the goal, panting, brilliantly flushed, her hair roughened by her swift passage through the air, safe and sound, within two yards of the low bank directly under which the water stood deep and still.

Jeanne, unused to the swift running many girls delight in, lost all control of herself, and dashed with ungoverned speed down the slope, to plunge headlong into the river. She flung up an arm, and sank like a stone under the green water. The elders of the company had dispersed to

gather the grapes. The younger stood transfixed, appalled. After an instant of frozen inaction, St. Vrain flung off his leather jerkin and moccasins, and dived into the stream. The loud splash he made woke the others from their trance of horror. Once, twice, thrice, the pale face of the girl arose above the water. The coureur snatched at her and missed. The third time he caught the long hair which had loosed, and swimming out of reach of her desperately clutching hands, with one hand he dragged her ashore. The cries and screams of the young people had brought the vintagers quickly on the scene.

The women were for returning home at once, but unselfish Jeanne, who bravely rallied, begged them not to shorten the day's pleasure. A huge fire was built of drift-wood at which Jeanne and St. Vrain dried their clothing, the coureur making light of his dripping apparel. One and another of the women spared Jeanne a garment, and soon all were composed again, but a shadow had fallen over their merriment.

Monsieur Dubois dropped his dignity, and with tearful eyes, again and again thanked St. Vrain. Madame threw an arm about his neck and kissed him on both cheeks, which, with pleasing simplicity, he accepted heartily and unabashed. Ferriby

looked on somewhat out of sympathy with the effusiveness of this scene, yet quite as thankful as the others. Near her stood Bevard, a cold sneer on his lips, his Indian nature uppermost.

"'Tis much ado over a girl!" he scoffed. "Here again we are in sympathy. You scorn this exhibition of weakness as I do!" he muttered disdainfully. Yet his white blood whispered tauntingly to him of the immense advantage the coureur had gained with the Dubois by his heroism.

The afternoon passed without further mishap, and at sunset they made ready for the homeward voyage. The half-moon was riding in the southern sky, like a pale shade, its faint silver outlusted by the fierce crimson of the declining sun, now resting on the horizon. Nature watched in silence the parting of these orbs. A breath of south wind scarcely rippled the great breast of the stream, or stirred the nude pendants of the willows. The sun dropped, waving upward broad, blood-red pennons which ensanguined the pale east. Impressible by nature, easily moved by beauty, the villagers watched the world-old spectacle with solemn pleasure, — some with a prayer at heart; some with a smile on the lips; some with a joy like pain. A flock of homing black-

birds, with a loud clatter like cymbals, broke the contemplative silence. With sharply indrawn breath, they turned their thoughts earthward. They loaded the boats with the fragrant black grapes, and the fleet was soon off, save two canoes, close together, well out in the stream.

Madame, solicitous for Jeanne, paid no especial attention to the rest of her flock, and the Dubois batteau set off among the first. Suzanne had intentionally eluded her mother to go home in company with some gay young people. On the shore, overlooked, stood Ferriby, who had waited like a docile child to be given place, and was left behind.

The owners of the two canoes, one of birch-bark, the other a basswood log, saw, and determined to seize upon this chance so 'strangely given them. At the same instant they started toward Ferriby. The birch-bark canoe flew silently as a feather dropped from the plumage of a high-sailing bird; the basswood pirogue noisily cut the water like a big racing fish, and came on almost as rapidly. Instead of keeping on to the shore, Bevard changed his course, and jammed his heavy pirogue against the stern of the frail canoe, with a vicious glance over his shoulder.

St. Vrain, quick of eye, and quick of motion, with instinct as acute as an animal's, read his

murderous intention. With a jeering laugh he whirled his boat about, and Bevard crashed violently into the bank and stuck there. Not losing an instant, St. Vrain was alongside the log used for a landing, and said: —

“Ma’m’selle Angèle, I cannot permit you to go home with such a savage. My canoe, as you know, will hold two. Come!”

It was the same little boat in which Ferriby, cradled like a babe, had been carried to Manette Taché’s. She did not hesitate, for she, too, had read aright the evil purpose of the *donné*, with even more thorough comprehension than the *coureur*.

Bevard was wholly savage in that he could not easily laugh; and the laugh of the *coureur* lashed him to the quick. A blow from the fist he could have returned, but the pitiless jeers of St. Vrain left him writhing.

As Ferriby and St. Vrain rowed away in the dun twilight, the *coureur* called out gayly to Bevard, who, ferociously angry, was tugging furiously to loose the sharp nose of his canoe from the suctorial mud: —

“I would speak with you to-night at the tavern, *mon garçon!*” He listened for an answer, but none came. He only heard from far up the stream the joyous singing of the homeward-bound villagers.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE COUREUR'S OPPORTUNITY

WHEN the coureur's strong pulling had carried them out of hearing of Bevard, though not into sight of the others, he felt that Providence had provided an opportunity for which he had long and timorously hoped.

Aside from saving Ferriby from perishing in the forest, he had twice rescued her from the importunities, or worse, of the savage donné, and his interest in her deepened daily. In the love affairs of such a man as St. Vrain, rivalry gives an immense impetus. Under its stimulus what was at first mere benevolence rushes headlong into passion. In this last encounter with Bevard his feelings had reached a climax, and must find expression. It was not his first grande passion, by any means. He had exhausted many, fleeting and gross. This was tender and pure. Yet a timidity he could not account for kept him silent. His natural boldness had deserted him and left him abashed. Perhaps it was due to the juvenility of the heart of the young girl, to whom all

maidenly blandishments and fancies seemed unknown. Perhaps it was an unfamiliar sense of unworthiness, a tribute to her vestal purity, that tied his glib tongue and kept him silent. Words huddled on his lips like frightened sheep and refused to move.

Ferriby sat gazing on the dimming sky in *une douce et molle rêverie, une nonchalance poétique*, "a gentle and soft revery, a poetic heedlessness." All the agitation roused by the *donné* was soothed by the sympathetic, restful, bland mood of nature told by the gentle lapping of the stream, the low twitter of sleepy birds, the placid quiet of the twilit hour. Presently she spoke softly, in keeping with it all:—

"Monsieur, you seem always to be my champion. How can I say more than that I trust and love you?" and she looked at him with innocent confidence.

"The purest homage of my heart is yours forever, *ma'm'selle!*" he cried ardently.

She looked at him with startled surprise, like a child suddenly shouted at. It seemed a kind of shock to hear him speak with such warmth.

"You love me! Ah, my pure one, you do not know what the love of woman is for man, nor his for her."

Then he said to himself: "Bah, fool! You speak to an infant!" Aloud: "You trust me! Such words make me your champion forever."

"Do you know, Hilaire, — may I call you so now you are so dear to me? — more dear than Suzanne. Yes, even more dear than Jeanne, my good angel."

"Yes, yes!" said St. Vrain, overcome with emotion. "It never sounded sweet to me before. Always call me so, Angèle, and I will be happy."

"I was beginning to tell you, Hilaire, that of late I have dim memories of those for whom I yearn, oh yes, till my heart aches and the tears fall. But, oh, Hilaire, it kills me; I cannot recall them to me. I cannot see their faces. Sometimes I see dim forms; and I hear faint voices too, so far off I cannot tell where they are, but I think I must have known them once. But whose, Hilaire? *You* tell me," she said beseechingly. "You brought me to O Poste; oh, can't you — can't you tell me? This day when I ran down the hill a little, little shadow went before me. I could almost grasp it with my hand, but it faded into the river."

"Her memory is awakening," thought St. Vrain, much troubled. "What will it bring? I dread to think." Then he said: —

"M'amie, who would tell you all sooner than Hilaire, if he could?"

"Sometimes my thoughts come up against a something like a baffling wall; if I could only mount it, beyond would be revealed all I so long to know. Can't you help me, Hilaire?" she said piteously.

"Le bon Dieu knows I would, dear one, if I too could see the wall. But alas! it exists not for St. Vrain. I may yet be led to it. Then my help will be all yours."

This seemed to satisfy her, and after a few moments she observed:—

"I do not tell these things to Jeanne; it troubles her, and makes her spend whole nights on her knees. Nor to Suzanne; she only jests about it. Élise would scorn me, and call me 'imbecile.' No; only to you, Hilaire, I feel I can tell all my thoughts. For you are kind and gentle, and listen to me without grief or laughing or scorning."

It was a most moving confidence, a most artless bestowal of trust, and it bound the coureur to her with even stronger ties of fealty. But passion withered in him under the chill of this ingenuous avowal of a pure and passionless affection, this childlike reliance on his brotherly love. He

felt with the prescience and pain of a lover that if passion had ever possessed her heart, it was not, nor ever would be, because of him.

They were now in sight of the fort, and a few strong strokes brought him among the last loiterers, young people, paired as innocently as doves. Angèle's absence had not been discovered, evidently, and in the confusion of debarking it was never known.

St. Vrain clasped her hand tenderly at parting, and said softly, —

“Remember, m'amie, you may always trust your devoted Hilaire.”

“Always, my dear good champion!” she answered gently, then walked homeward with the rest.

St. Vrain looked after her sorrowfully and murmured to himself: —

“She hath the innocence of a child in matters of love! ‘*Adieux trop malheureux et trop parfait passion!*’”

CHAPTER XXVIII

AT THE TAVERN

THAT night the tavern was unusually lively. Old Jean Blieu, the tapster, could hardly fill the pewter mugs fast enough with taffia, peach brandy, and sour red wine. A great fire freshly fed with green hickory logs, from which the sweet sap stewed, blazed in licking tongues of flame. A delicious fragrance went up from the apple-toddy simmering on the hearth, profaned by the reek of tobacco.

The talk going forward was unusually brisk and lively. The habitués of the tavern could not hope to join the haut ton of the village in the grape gathering, but they might pick up stray fruitage afterward, in the guise of gossip. They thirsted more to hear the minutest detail of the day's adventures than for their cups. Old cronies at écarté had dropped their cards for the time. The billiard-balls on the two tables at the far end of the big room were not clicking as usual, but lay at wide distances, while the players

leaned upon their cues, eagerly listening to Felix Lutrell relating the story of the day; elated at being, thus vicariously, a hero.

In the midst of it all entered St. Vrain, affable and unflagging. "Chut! Mon enfant," he cried to Felix, "you do but spew out loppered milk! Speak of something fresh! Come, my friends—all! drink to the success of my voyage; for to-morrow I set out again for Detroit, or—who knows where? Hein? It is a long and wearisome journey. Come! come! drink!"

He filled a mug with taffia, and burst into uproarious song:—

"And let me the canakin clink, clink;
And let me the canakin clink:
A soldier's a man;
A life's but a span;
Then let the soldier drink."

A long gurgle followed as a refrain, for there were no refusals to drink to the coureur's health. When every lip had a cup at it, when every head was tipped back to drain the last drop, the *donné* came in.

"Just in time, my good friend, just in time to drink my health, and to the success of the long journey I am about to undertake," called out St. Vrain, with mocking urbanity. With all eyes

upon him, — for even these good, stupid folk began to see that the *donné* and the *coureur* loved not each other overly well, though they knew not why, — Gaston had not the courage to refuse ; so that he drank at one gulp, with a grimace, a glass of fiery peach brandy.

“Was’t so bitter, *mon ami*,” jeered St. Vrain, “that thy lips curled at it? I fear ’twill not be thy bitterest dose, *mon garçon*!”

The *coureur* delighted in baiting the *donné*, and Bevard stood glaring at him ferociously as an animal at bay. The rustics gaped at them, but they failed to probe to the heart of the matter. They perceived that the quick stabs of the *coureur* went home, though the weapon was invisible. The priest’s pupil was liked but little ; for was not he of the despised Indian blood, and worse, — of the hated English ; a waif, on their charity since birth? Alas for those reared by the hard hand of Charity, she leaves a brand that invites the mean disdain of the small, and the condescending favor of the great!

But St. Vrain, a reckless dare-devil, who every day risked life with a gay quip at its possible ending, was the favorite of all. He might carry despatches from the commandant at O Poste to the English governor at Detroit, but what

of it? Should a time come when he could assert himself to some purpose, he would be found one of them — a Frenchman! Loyal to the core to his countrymen!

St. Vrain's song, St. Vrain's mad spirits, roused them all to tumultuous jollity.

In the midst of an uproarious chorus were two arrivals. Gradually a silence fell upon them, broken by fuddled snatches of song or tipsy hiccoughs. And every eye appraised the newcomers. Aye, many doubted them! the coming of strangers to that out-of-the-way place was always enormously significant!

One they soon classed. He was the servant of the other, who was not so easily ranked. The master might be a French officer in disguise.

That he was a Frenchman they all agreed. He carried himself with an air of authority and distinction emphasized by his garb of an elegance not usual in the wilderness, which gave grounds for their surmises. He gave orders to the landlord with a haughty air, and even requested St. Vrain in no gentle tones to relieve him of his capote. With a grimace and wink to the company, the coureur took it off with such a flourish that the corner slapped smartly into the owner's face.

"Sacre! fellow, would you blind me?" he demanded fiercely.

"Pardon, monsieur! I am not used to serving as a lackey, and am overly awkward!" With a bow of mock deference he added, "I am only Hilaire Boniface Louis St. Vrain, at your service!"

But in such surprising manner was his announcement received that he stopped midway in his deep genuflection to stare; for the man's face had taken on a comical blending of obsequiousness and embarrassment. Quickly recovering his composure, the stranger demanded sharply:—

"Can you prove that to be true?"

It was the coureur's turn to be astonished, and he stared harder than ever.

"Prove it! Why, every man from La Belle Rivière to Quebec knows Hilaire St. Vrain, the coureur de bois. Ask Father Gibault, ask the commandant, ask Monsieur Dubois, ask 'Sieur Vigo, ask any one here! Who else should I be? Hein?"

"Does he speak truly, landlord?" asked the stranger, appealing to old Landais, who stood aloof, grinning and rubbing his hands over the unusual interest of the occasion, and the notoriety it would give his house.

"Yes, yes! Certainly! I have it from no less

than Père Gibault himself, who knew the lad in Quebec, when he came in the train of the Comte de Foret!"

"Well, then, monsieur, I would speak privately with you," said the stranger, turning to St. Vrain with an air of great respect. "Landlord, an apartment!" he ordered superciliously.

"With me aside? No, no! These are my friends. You'll speak here!"

"What! before these bourgeois,—these canaille! on a subject of such grave importance?"

"Aye; speak here, or not at all!" persisted St. Vrain, stubbornly; "they are my friends!"

"I have no choice. If I must, I must!" The stranger seated himself at a table decorated with sundry wet rings, and motioned his servant to fetch him the leather saddle-bags he carried. From one side he drew several legal-looking documents, some of old yellow parchment, some of fair new, tied into neat packets with red strings.

He selected from among them a letter with the seal carefully cut around. At sight of this seal St. Vrain, who had followed all his movements coolly, started and changed countenance, from red to palest tan.

His friends, eagerly watching every move, grew fearful, and drew closer about him.

“What the devil had St. Vrain been up to?”

“Was the daring rogue to be torn from them and carried to prison? No, no! Hilaire’s friends would never permit that!”—they speculated inwardly. The stranger waved them back.

With deliberation and portentous gravity he opened the crackling parchment, the tipplers meanwhile wondering whether the coureur were to be shot or hanged; surely, such gravity meant one or t’other! Every eye was painfully fixed on the stranger; every ear cruelly strained to catch the first word. Not a sound was heard but the “cluck” of the clock at five minutes of nine; and the sputter of the brew of apple-toddy now foaming over on the coals, sending out a stifling cloud of the smoke from burned sugar and brandy.

Enjoying his importance to the utmost, the stranger prolonged the suspense beyond endurance. At last St. Vrain burst out impatiently:—

“Sir, if you *have* ought to say to me, speak at once, for I must be gone.”

“At your command, sir! You are Hilaire Boniface Louis St. Vrain?”

“Yes!”

“Third son of Antoine René Charles St. Vrain, Comte de Boisvert?”

All eyes rolled from the speaker as he paused, toward St. Vrain, with redoubled interest; for even in that obscure spot a title had a pleasing sound, a certain worth.

“As I have said!” the coureur briefly answered.

“Who came from France in 176— in the train of the Comte de Foret?”

“The same!” — impatiently.

“Then, monsieur, I would have you read this document,” handing it to St. Vrain.

The coureur stumblingly read it half through, laboring mightily over the hard words, for he was but a poor scholar. It told him in the circumlocution of law terms that his father was dead, and, failing other heirs, — both older sons having honorably departed this life, one in the Seven Years’ War, the other in a duel, — that he, Hilaire Boniface Louis St. Vrain, was heir to the title and estates of his late father.

St. Vrain showed nothing of grief; he only seemed a trifle more serious as he folded the rustling parchment.

He had run off to America, now ten years gone, with other wild youths of the noblesse who had followed the fortunes of le Comte de Foret; he scarcely knew his father, a soldier; and between himself and his brothers there was small good-will;

they were sons of different mothers, and his own had died in his childhood. He had hardly expected such a ticket from Fortune's wheel, and it made him feel strangely regretful for what might have been. He broke the silence of the curious crowd by saying to the stranger, —

“May I ask, monsieur, who you are, and how you came into possession of these family papers?”

The man briefly explained that he was a notary from Quebec, Baptiste Vaquette, and he had been induced by interested persons (for a not trifling consideration, he omitted to say) to undertake the tremendous task of searching for the heir through the trails of the Great Wilderness. After six months of wandering hither and yon, he had at last, by the exercise of his unerring sagacity, come upon the coureur's trail at Detroit, where he had got his clew from the beastly English.

At this splenetic expression St. Vrain's face showed shame; for it told him forcibly how far beneath his noble birth the notary esteemed him to have fallen — to have become a despatch bearer to his hereditary enemies! And he felt it indeed to be true.

None were more pleased at his good fortune than his cronies at the tavern. They crowded about him, crushing his hands in their strong

grip, the more mellowed by their frequent drams, kissing him with loud smacks on both cheeks.

Gaston Bevard only stood apart, with envy, hate and malice gnawing at his heart. There was malison in the flaming of his fierce eye that he dared not utter; beneath his breath he stammered a few syllables of his mother's tongue; he turned to leave the room.

St. Vrain, seeing the movement, called to him:

"Hold there, my friend! not a good word for me? Wait! I would walk with you!"

Turning to the landlord, he threw on the table a handful of English silver, and said, —

"Let all drink to my good health again, Pierre, — or rather, to my long life!" and he laughed carelessly as he followed Gaston out of doors.

Outside, the aspect of the night had changed; the moon had set, but the sky was thickly flecked with stars, from the great steadfast, blue planet, to the gilt sparklets which were lost to sight while gazing on them. A boisterous wind had risen and sent the frost-bitten leaves down like a pattering shower.

With a few rapid steps St. Vrain overtook Bevard, who was walking along the road to the fort, and he began abruptly to speak to him: —

“You cowardly beast! Twice — yes, three times — have you tried to murder me! And but for my regard for Father Gibault I long ago would have ended your miserable life! Now I demand the satisfaction of a gentleman! A *gentleman* — ! do you comprehend? I doubt not I lower myself in asking it of *you*! None of your skulking Indian tricks, mind you! but a fair fight, face to face.”

“I’ll give you satisfaction — a long one! Aye, that I will! I’ll —” choked the *donné*, like a strangling dog.

“It’s a little unusual, my friend, but you’re not to be trusted! My plan is that we fight till one or the other, mayhap both, is dead — dead! Comprehend you? You agree?”

“I do — but —”

“Hold! I have not done! We’ll seek out some secluded spot, you to have the choice, as becomes the challenged, where we will conduct this combat. But there are conditions under which I demean myself to fight you; otherwise I fight you not, but I kick you for a despicable cur, and let you go. Yes!”

“Name them!” said Bevard, furious at the other’s bitter contempt, and unable to speak further.

“That we two only shall meet at the place you may select, and with the weapons of your choice do fight to the death; but before we begin you must promise me on your honor—if a craven have honor—to grant two requests I shall at *that* time ask of you, as I shall likewise grant to you. My honor is pledged to it. This is unusual, monsieur, between gentlemen, as you may not know; but then—*you* are unusual!” And he laughed softly.

The Indian in him roused; Bevard would have flung himself furiously on the coureur and have throttled him, but St. Vrain sprang lightly aside, and jeered in his face. Just then a crowd of hilarious soldiers came toward them, intent on gaining the fort before tattoo sounded. Gasping with rage Gaston managed to stammer: “Damn you, I will! Meet me on the other side of the river, half an hour before sun-up, opposite the ‘Mam-melle.’”

“Without fail, monsieur!” courteously responded the coureur, as he walked off with the soldiers.

CHAPTER XXIX

OPPOSITE THE "MAMMELLE"

THE sun was not yet risen, nor did he premonish his coming by a pictorial display of red-tinted clouds or searching shafts of pale yellow light. All was sullen and dark! A thick, gray, pall-like mist, which dripped in heavy drops from the faded foliage, met and shut out a darker gray sky. Yet signs of morning were not lacking; fish leaped in the river; the few remaining vireos twittered intermittently; the loud, raucous call of the blackbirds sounded the assembly for the day's foraging among the beech woods; the slow, even hammering of the woodpecker which, under the spell of the gloomy surroundings, sounded like driving nails into a coffin; a lark that had delayed its flitting to the warm south poured from its grateful breast its brief, rare melody; all welcomed day, dark though it was. A blue crane, with long legs folded back, flew in awkward lunges, with a croaking cry, disturbed by an unwonted sound that drove him in a panic from

his harborage among the long sedges and flags on the river's brink.

Early as it was, half an hour before sunrise, a birch-bark canoe shot lightly as a swallow across the leaden river, seemingly driving ahead of it the billows of mist instead of cutting through them. It was the *coureur de bois*, and he had scarcely made fast when the *donné's* pirogue was drawn in beside his canoe.

No time was trifled away in the interchange of courtesies between these two. They met in grim-mest silence, and exchanged one hostile glance.

St. Vrain spoke at last, and then unwisely:—

"I hardly looked for so unusual a favor from one of your kind! You do me great honor, *monsieur*!"

"And *you* give me an opportunity I have long desired!"

"Heh! to scalp me, or to stab me in the back!" jeered the *coureur*. A malevolent look, which confessed him to murder, was the only notice Bevard took of the taunt.

"However, to business! Between gentlemen it would be conducted somewhat differently, eh, *Monsieur le Donné*?"

"State your conditions without further quibbling. I'm in haste to be gone!" observed the priest's pupil, significantly.

"You *are* hopeful! Whither — to paradise?"

"Yes; to paradise — the paradise of a woman's favor, to speak like a weakling white!" said Gaston, grimly contemptuous.

"He will bear watching for a desperate wretch," thought the coureur. "You came here," he said aloud, with a change of manner, dropping his jeering carelessness as he threw off his leather jerkin, "under promise to grant me two requests which I was to make known to you on this spot which you chose. You may think me whimsical," he smiled pleasantly, "but, remember, I am a Frenchman, and as such may indulge in tricks, — not," he amended with a sudden access of sternness, "of your sort, however, monsieur. Eh?"

Bevard made no reply, but under the mocking eye, the inveighing words of the Frenchman, seemed suddenly transformed into a veritable savage. His lips were drawn thin over his tightly clinched teeth; his eyes grew bright with deadly purpose; his features stiffened into masklike calm, which brought into full relief his high cheek-bones and finely aquiline nose; his color darkened. Where a white would have paled, he turned to a copper hue. At that moment he strikingly betrayed the strongest physical mark-

ings of his mother's race. His soul was surcharged with its most brutal qualities, — resentment, hate, desire for revenge, and a longing to inflict cruel and hideous torture on his tormentor.

The Frenchman was cool and wary, and at an impatient guttural of imprecation from Bevard, disclosed his conditions.

"We agreed to fight to the death last night. What I demand further is this: That together we dig a grave near by the 'field of honor,' " — he grinned sardonically, — "the one who falls, to be decently buried in it by the survivor. Should there be none — In that case the buzzards and wolves will save us all trouble. Secondly, that the survivor shall swear by all that is sacred, never to reveal one circumstance connected with this morning's work. Comprehend you?"

For the first time the *donné* smiled flittingly, but not enough to throw the red blood of a paler race into his saturnine face.

"I agree to all, but how to accomplish —?"

"The grave digging?" interrupted St. Vrain. "I thought of all that, *monsieur*." He pointed to his canoe, wherein lay a spade and a mattock. "I anticipated your acceptance of the conditions, *monsieur*," he added politely. "State your own terms, if you please."

"Pistols at twelve paces, each his own weapon," briefly replied the *donné*.

"As you say, *monsieur*!"

Bevard mounted the low, sandy bank, and sought out a place he well knew. The *coureur*, securing the spade and mattock, slung them over his shoulder, and followed Gaston. The spot selected for the duelling ground was within sound of the river, a stretch of smooth sward, hedged in on the farther side by a strong, close coppice. Great pale green mats of mullein with next year's bloom at the heart lay here and there on the flat expanse where thus future life and near death met.

"I leave also the choice of the place of the grave to you," said St. Vrain, cheerfully, as if at the most ordinary business.

Bevard walked south a little way, and penetrating a thicket, found a spot so retired and shaded it was not likely to tell of that morning's dark work, and himself took the mattock to measure off the sinister proportions. The *coureur* had followed.

"A little longer, my friend! Say three inches!" observed St. Vrain, coolly regarding its limits.

Implacable and vengeful, Bevard dug to half the depth with the mattock and the spade. Then St. Vrain, spitting on his palms, set to work with a

will, carefully adding the three inches to the length that Bevard had ignored. When two are so intent on a performance, it is soon accomplished. Springing out of the shallow pit, some three or four feet deep in the sandy soil, his hands planted on either rim, St. Vrain brushed the crumbling earth from his garments carefully, and observed to Bevard, —

“What next, monsieur?”

Gaston made no reply, but returned to the duelling ground he had chosen. He took a position in the centre of it: —

“We will each walk six paces from here,” he observed. “You may count aloud; at six turn and fire!”

For an instant they stood back to back. Each had thrown off his head-covering, — Bevard his black hat, St. Vrain his gaudy wool cap with its twinkling gold tassel. The tall, lithe figure of the black-clad *donné* towered above the sinewy *coureur* half a head. Smiling at the discrepancy between them, St. Vrain made a step forward, counting aloud, —

“One — two — three —”

Then occurred one of those small interpositions of Providence which put to naught men’s plans to carry out some design of its own. St. Vrain had

glanced over his shoulder toward the *donné*. He saw him turn, then a flash and crack of a pistol, just as his own foot rolled on a bit of broken limb. He lurched forward, and tried to regain his balance; his weapon flew from his hand; he sprawled on all fours. Through the space he had just filled whistled a murderous bullet.

Quick as a darting snake-tongue St. Vrain was on his feet.

"Would you, coward!—beast!" he screamed, his voice shrill with rage, "murder me?"

He snatched at his belt. There was a flash of steel upward, a sibilant breath, a downward twirl of the knife, and the sharp point plunged clean through the miscreant's neck. It was a trick of knife-throwing the Indians had taught him, and his skill at it was even greater than theirs. He stood fiercely regarding Bevard, his breast heaving, his eyes glaring from under his tumbled black hair. A horrible, mirthless grin of satisfaction bared his white teeth. He looked supremely savage.

The doomed wretch made one frantic snatch at the knife. He tore it from his flesh, only to lunge heavily forward in awful helplessness,—a gory carcass from which emanated a sickening aura.



“He lurched forward . . . and sprawled on all fours.”

"'Twas well indeed, thou dastard, we shaped it larger!" sneered the coureur, as, with his foot, he turned over the limber, bleeding corpse.

"How I detest to touch this carrion—never much but that! But a promise is a promise, — 'noblesse oblige'!"

He bared himself to the skin, that no blood-stain might betray him, or sully the whiteness of his new doeskin breeches and jerkin. His strength, nurtured of the forest, was immense. With ease he dragged the body of the hapless wretch to the pit, and tumbled it in. He looked upon it an instant, and with one of his swift changes of feeling said aloud:—

"After all he was, in some sort, a man," and he broke twigs from the bushes, and flung over the body a gay red and yellow shroud of the autumn foliage. He piled on it the earth and made all smooth and clean; rolled logs over it to keep off the scurvy, marauding beasts; and no trace remained of Gaston Bevard, the *donné*, but the pool of bright red blood not yet clotted, which the rain, now gently falling, would dilute, and the greedy earth would swallow up.

Hardened to such scenes as this in which he had borne a part, it meant little more to St. Vrain than just retribution for treachery. The

man was half savage, and would be speedily forgot, once out of the way. To him the splendid youth, the magnificent temple its dwelling-place, the body, which he had destroyed but could never restore, did not appeal; Bevard was a skulking foe to him and nothing more. He felt neither sorrow nor regret for his deed; satisfaction more nearly described his mood.

"If a man of honor fight you," thought the coureur as he turned from the grave, "you accord him the consideration one gentleman should another,—even regret when fate decrees his fall. But such as yonder—" A jerk of the thumb backward over his shoulder meted out the measure of his contempt.

He walked to the margin of the river, dragging with him the spade and the mattock; placed them in Gaston's pirogue, loosed it, and in another instant it was on its way down to La Belle Rivière.

After carefully bathing he reclathed himself in his spotless doeskin, jumped nimbly aboard his canoe, and glided under the palisades of the fort on his way to Detroit, bearing to Hamilton a report of the weakness of Helm's garrison, just as the morning gun boomed.

CHAPTER XXX

A CHANCE ENCOUNTER

LANCASTER had found Detroit lively with traders, trappers, and coureurs, who had gathered there from the far recesses of the forest. The rough woodsmen had thrown themselves, heart and soul, into the rude amusements of the place, and among them he had passed unnoticed. He had made it his first business to visit every Indian village, of which there were half a score in the vicinity of the fort. He had found the temporary encampment of the fierce Puans close to the lodges of the Ottawas, with whom they had patched up a specious friendship. Not a bark hut nor wigwam was there that he did not search again and again, but to no purpose. His quest was but a heartbreaking failure. No white woman could he find among their dingy squaws. He came to the conclusion that, if Ferriby were yet living, she had been handed from one tribe to another, friendly to the Puans, to make naught all efforts for her recovery, and, according to their

custom, would be reclaimed by the original captors after the search was abandoned as hopeless. Maddened by this thought, desperate with misery, Lancaster resolved to return to Kaskaskia and cast in his lot with Clark, whose plan of campaign was rash enough to be to his taste, lawless enough to suit his purpose, and rich with opportunities for vengeance. His enterprise appealed to him as being of sufficient interest to distract his mind, and of danger enough to bring him speedy death.

In this mood he set off for the Illinois country at dawn one sharp morning of early winter. None too soon, for suspicion was beginning to hint at him as an American spy. He had hardly left the fort before a company of Indians came in with the belated news of the American victories in the wilderness. A few hours later an express arrived from Quebec with imperative orders for instant departure to the Illinois country. Twenty-four hours after his own departure, while he slept peacefully in his little pirogue among the reeds, a fleet of batteaux, carrying eighty British regulars and five hundred Indian mercenaries, slipped by him on its way to the fort on the Ouibache.

He crossed the great lake, entered the Maumee, made the portage at Omee, where the industrious

beavers had dammed the stream and cut off the portage by nine miles; and, after a few days, reached the upper Ouibache, and launched his canoe for the easier part of his journey.

It was the cheerless, uncertain weather of early December. The intervals of wide prairie impinging on the river were not altogether bleached of their verdant tint; but the tracts of forest through which the river winded were bare, and the chill north wind caused their limbs to rattle together like rapid drumming. Every twig of those on the shore was blackly etched on the dull green waters. The sunshine had warmth in it yet, and Lancaster, clad in thick winter clothing of buckskin, with a capote of buffalo hide, his head snugly covered by a coonskin cap, with its long striped tail dangling, fared well enough; he was too wretched in mind, at any rate, to notice physical discomfort.

He was approaching the We-a towns, where the lodges of the Shewanees and Weatenons were pitched in friendly community at the mouth of the creek, beyond which spread the We-a plain to the confines of the forest.

From this point the We-a Trail led to O Poste, a five days' journey,—a little less by water, helped by the strong current of the Ouibache.

Just above the villages the river made a great bend. On either hand were low banks, on which a few beeches grew, whose dry dun leaves kept up a mournful rustling. Absorbed in gloomy thoughts, Lancaster was roused by loud, cheery singing. The song seemed to him heartless frivolity and the singer an odious fool.

“Je suis jeune et belle,
Je veux m’engage
Un amant fidèle.”

“‘Un amant fidèle!’ he was indeed that, but what could one know of faithful love who could bellow of it like that to every passer-by?” irritably questioned Lancaster to himself.

A few strokes of the paddle brought him in full view of the villages, and he beheld a boatman in the act of setting off down-stream. A group of blanketed Indians were watching him with friendly interest, admiring his perfect handling of the skittish birch-bark, freakish as a woman. The voyageur was standing in the careless attitude of the master of his craft, the veriest egg-shell, paddling with one long oar. He was a remarkable object to Lancaster’s eye. His figure was muscular, lithe, and straight, but fell short of his own height by some six inches. He wore a gaudy wool cap, shaped like a bag, tied at one end with

a gold tassel. A capote of exquisite beaver fur was bound closely about his waist by a leather belt studded with silver, through which was thrust a pair of pistols, a long knife, and the inevitable hatchet of bright, keen steel. His feet, slender and shapely, were clad with moccasins thickly crusted with bead embroidery. His leggings were richly fringed with shells and porcupine quills stained bright red. His black hair was tied with a gay ribbon into a queue, and gold earrings dangled from his ears.

His singing revealed white teeth glittering between his scarlet lips; his cheeks were deeply tanned with the red of sumachs flaming in them; his bold black eyes showed infinite capacity for fun and mischief. With the off-hand bonhomie of his kind he greeted Lancaster, as he overtook him, with the vivacity and familiarity of an old acquaintance.

“Hello, my friend!” he called in French, “would you have good company? For, by all the saints, I love not mine own too long, though it be of the best!” He smiled broadly at his jest at his own expense.

“If it suit you, it suits me!” replied Lancaster, in the cool Anglo-Saxon fashion that sounded almost gruff after this lively Gallic greeting.

But the *coureur de bois* seemed to understand the race and accepted his answer cheerily, and as a matter of course.

They dropped down the river, side by side, like old companions. Not two hours had passed till the Frenchman had told his name, — Hilaire St. Vrain (without his newly acquired title); his business, *coureur de bois*, just now carrying pacific messages to O Poste (but not stating their source to his new friend). He prattled on with the artless craft of the born intriguer.

His morose companion scarcely heeded him, and made no return of confidence.

“Peste! the beast! What he knows he will not tell! Perhaps this will warm his frozen blood and loose his tongue,” said St. Vrain to himself, chagrined. He drew from his leather pouch a flask of famous peach brandy, pulled the stopple, and courteously passed it over to Lancaster, to whom the liquor was most grateful; for his low spirits had reduced his circulation till the damp north wind chilled him to the marrow.

St. Vrain drank in his turn, and said aloud, “To your good health monsieur!” — and to himself, “And to my success in loosing that tongue of yours.”

To his disgust the only result was to make the

stranger *ask* questions, not answer them; nor would he drink again, though urgently pressed. St. Vrain drank and drank, and talked and talked. When the flask was low, he became sentimental and confidential.

"Hélas!" he cried tearfully, "thou cold-blooded Saxon! Thou'st never been racked by the cruel pangs of love as I have, I swear!"

"You seemed to sing cheerfully enough of love only a few hours ago!" observed Lancaster, dryly.

"Stupid one! It was but to cover up the heart rent," and he nearly sobbed.

Lancaster's lip curled at his maudlin humor, and could not forbear a fling: "A rent soon mended, I think!"

His tone was contemptuous; he had come to regard himself as the only faithful lover.

"Ice-cold blood flows from thy heart! Do you think you *could* love as I do the fair Angèle? Well was she named 'Angel,' for her locks are as sunny as the pictured one's, hanging over the altar in the great cathedral in Quebec. Her eyes, — ah! those beautiful eyes, — bluer than the edges of broken ice, as crystal clear, but as cold!"

"And who possesses such charms?" asked Lancaster, idly, humoring his tipsy mood.

"Angèle Dubois. A tall white angel she is among the swarthy girls at 'Sieur Dubois's!'"

"You say," asked Lancaster, with quickening interest, "that your sweetheart is fair and her sisters are dark?" For one moment dull recollections troubled him; his memory recalled the dim vision of a wan girl he had seen through the window briefly, and her frightened shriek sounded again in his ear. The next moment he was as far off from St. Vrain as the miles that stretched between them and O Poste.

"Pig! Imbecile!" muttered St. Vrain. "I cannot make him talk! He is an American spy, then! Very well! We shall see!"

The coureur watched Lancaster with an eye far from dulled by his potations, which in truth had been liberal but of little effect from long habit. They camped amiably together that night, snuggled side by side in a bed of leaves and fir boughs. They breakfasted on a squirrel brought down by Lancaster's unerring shot with the coureur's pistol, for weapons he had none except his long knife. They set off again with no change of their relations of the day before, except for the greater baffling of the coureur and the increased taciturnity of Lancaster. The greater part of the day they glided swiftly down-

stream together. The coureur's curiosity had grown almost beyond the limit of endurance, but his urbanity did not fail.

Lancaster had learned all he cared to know of the coureur, but he had no particular reason for not confiding in him beyond that of common caution.

At last they turned the great Pointe Coupée, a few miles above O Poste, and found themselves in sight of a fleet of batteaux, which were mounted with cannon and crowded with red-coats and Indians to the number of four or five hundred.

It was Hamilton, the "Hair-buyer general," bound for the recapture of O Poste. The British ensign displayed on his batteau told Lancaster this before the gibing voice of the coureur cried, —

"Mon ami, you are a prisoner!" and he covered him with a long pistol.

A little creek emptied into the river just at this point. Its mouth was covered with the thin white ice that forms over shallows. Lancaster was next to the shore. The Frenchman had mistaken his man. Quick as a panther's leap his long oar sprang up, then down it crashed on the coureur's wrist, with such force as to set him

screeching with pain; his pistol dropped with a splash into the icy water of the Ouibache. Before St. Vrain could recover his wits he heard a crackle and crunch, and Lancaster's canoe had smashed the ice in the mouth of the little creek; he had bounded ashore and was free!

"May all the devils in hell catch him!" groaned the coureur, in impotent rage, before he could think to give voice to such a yell that he attracted the notice of the fleet.

Lancaster found the trail and ran for his life; through the narrow passway between great trees, on a short stretch of the open, over a morass, jumping from tussock to tussock, down the uneven bank to the long level where the fort stood, up to the very gates! The sentinel would have stopped him.

"Fool! Down with your gun or I'll brain you!"

He rushed on, leaving the sentinel stupid with surprise. The brief winter day had settled to evening, and great fires were alight on the parade-ground. He crossed the bright space to Helm's quarters, burst into his presence without ceremony, and gasped out:—

"The British are coming! They're within three miles of the fort!"

Helm, calm and cool, as if he had just heard of the coming of Clark, commanded the long roll to be sounded. His twenty men answered promptly. The boom of a cannon warned the militia. Fuel was heaped on the fires. One of the two cannon, which, with a couple of small swivels, was all the ordnance the fort could boast, was wheeled in front of the gate, on which there was no secure fastening; the gunner stood ready.

"My friend," said Helm, aside to Lancaster, "I have but four seasoned American soldiers I can rely on. The French cannot be depended on to do the work of trained men, but I am determined to play a brave part."

"Command me as one of your own soldiers, captain," Lancaster replied earnestly. Without spoken thanks Helm took him at his word and sent him to Lieutenant Barnes, with orders to take command for ten minutes, and retired at once to his own quarters and wrote as calmly to Clark as if he were detailing some petty business, the following letter¹:—

"DEAR SIR:—At this time there is an army within three miles of this place; I heard of their coming several days beforehand. I sent spies to

¹ Verbatim, Canadian Archive, Series B, Vol. 122, p. 250.

find the certainty; the spies being taken prisoners, I never got intelligence till they were within three miles of the town. As I had called the militia, and had every assurance of their integrity, I ordered at the firing of a cannon every man to appear, but I saw but few. Captain Busseron behaved much to his honor and credit, but I doubt the certain conduct of a certain gent. Excuse haste, as the army is in sight. My determination is to defend the garrison, though I have but twenty-one men but what has left me. I refer you to Mr. — for the rest. The army is in three hundred yards of the village. You must think how I feel; not four men that I can really depend upon, but am determined to act brave—think of my condition. I know it is out of my power to defend the town, as not one of the militia will take arms, though before sight of the army, no braver men. There is a flag at a small distance. I must conclude.

“Your humble servant,

“Leo’d Helm.

“Must stop.”

Before he had hardly shaken the pounce-box over the letter, he flung it to a messenger in waiting, saying:—

“Take it to Lieutenant Bowman, who is attending a fête at Colonel Dubois’s. Tell him to lose not a moment; to go at once and deliver that to Clark.”

Helm rushed to the gate where the gunner stood by the gun. Another moment and the steady tramp of feet was heard as the British crossed the short level from the river bank to the gate.

Helm stood with lighted match in hand, himself ready to touch off the gun. With magnificent bravado he ordered loudly, —

“Halt!”

To his surprise, his command was obeyed; the sound of cadenced marching ceased.

“Surrender!” demanded a thick, imperious voice from without,—the voice of Hamilton himself.

From behind the frail wooden barrier a bold challenge was flung to the army of five hundred by the dauntless Helm.

“By the God of Heaven, no man shall enter here till I know the terms!”

This audacity created a momentary silence:—

“You shall have the honors of war!” the same voice answered.

“Then,” cried Helm, “I surrender the fort on that condition!”

The gateway was cleared, with a flourish, of its one cannon, and Hamilton's army made entrance.

Lancaster, standing near Helm, saw a look of disgust, at thus being so neatly outwitted, flit over the face of the "Hair-buyer." His chagrin was boundless when he learned how small was the garrison, how few were the Americans; how he had been out-generalled by a backwoodsman.

Not more than a score of prisoners all told, who must be given the honors of war by his own agreement! In this case scalping and massacre by his Indian mercenaries (of whom his army was composed, with the exception of eighty regulars), was barred by his own promise.

Hiding his mortification as well as he could, he halted beside Helm and took his proffered arms, a long knife and pistol, which their owner handed over with an ill-concealed grin; and the key of the fort, for which there was a broken lock.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE PANCAKE TURNING

TIME had slipped easily away through the lovely days of October, through the frosty weeks of November, into the wintry days of mid December, diversified by as little labor as might be; for the villager did not love hard toil. Fêtes of all kinds, for which there was the slightest excuse, were much to his taste. He did love opportunity for friendly gatherings.

The coureur was greatly missed from these social affairs. He was the life and soul of merriment when he chanced to be in the village. Many were the regrets at his continued absence, more prolonged than ever before; they were not aware that he had gone to Quebec to establish his claim to his title and estates, and if possible to embark for France to take possession. But there were no sea-going vessels at this time of the year, and he was obliged to await the opening of spring navigation. On his return from Quebec he had just missed Hamilton at Detroit, and had

followed him on his campaign to retake the French towns in the Illinois country. Fond of excitement, it would help him through the interval of waiting before he could set out for France in the spring. What pleasanter place than O Poste, to pass the time in? The truth was there dwelt the one woman who had caught his fickle fancy and bound it fast to faithfulness.

The villagers themselves had accepted the new régime, much as if they were outsiders in the affair. To be sure, the young men, in somewhat specious enthusiasm, had joined the militia with the acknowledged purpose of defending the fort should such necessity arise, and had placed themselves at the command of Captain Helm. They enjoyed the drills like children romping; and these were signals for the whole village to turn out and admire. Is it surprising that vanity is an integral part of a soldier? As yet they had not been called upon to give actual service.

The *donné's* disappearance caused but little comment, and no regret. He was always a gloomy, dampening presence, — a death's-head at the feast. He had not a drop of that Gallic blood which flitted like mercury through the veins of the villager, and led him into prankings with the abandon of childhood. He had the Indian's

contempt for childish romping among grown men; and the savage's contempt for gallantry toward women. It was not unusual for him to disappear into the wilderness at the call of the forest-spirits for weeks at a time, to return shamefacedly, humiliated at yielding weakly to the leadings of an immaterial force. Gross and material he was, but the great voices of Nature appealed to him with irresistible power. They thundered to him in the storms, they awed him in the mighty winds; they wooed him in the beauty of spring, in the whispers of nascent foliage. On his return from these excursions he renewed his devotions with fanatic ardor, which soon wore out; but he realized that the life of a religieuse was his only salvation from savagery. Again and again feverish asceticism yielded to Indian stoic fatalism; it was a never ending contention between his two natures, the unsubduable Saxon, the untamable savage. One moment he was a creature of lofty aspirations; the next frantic to bury his face in the entrails of a yet warm beast and to gorge on it till glutted! At such times he would slip off to the forest. His habits were well known to the villagers, who looked on his waywardness with good-natured toleration; and upon this, his last and longest disappearance,

they had concluded that the influence of the mother-blood had been strongest, — when is it not? — and that he had joined himself to some roving band, to return no more.

Therefore his continued absence was no longer a subject for conversation when Madame Dubois invited the haut ton of the village, which included the greater part of the inhabitants, to a pancake turning, to relieve the tedium of the long weeks before the holidays.

The demoiselles, Élise, Suzanne, and Jeanne, each in her own fashion, were full of excitement. Even Angèle was moved out of her dreamy calm to something akin to brightness. For once she threw off her habitual apathy, and merrily wreathed greens and helped to garnish parlors and halls till they were gay as at the Christmas fête.

All was done! the hour of five had struck. Evening had descended, for the day was cloudy, and light had failed shortly after four, and they awaited the arrival of the first guests. The curtains had been parted that the light within might guide their guests through the muddy lanes of the little town. Madame, rotund and short of breath, her eyes twinkling with satisfaction from out deep cushions of fat, like the heads of black pins, was arrayed in a new gown of homespun,

gayly striped the wrong way for one of her bulk. The occasion was not one for grand toilette!

Monsieur, at her right hand, was clad in his second best coat of dark blue home-made cloth, but he wore a fine, beruffled shirt, foaming from between its lapels, and his queue was tied with a fresh new black ribbon. His knee-breeches were of doeskin; his stockings of blue yarn; and his low shoes of tanned bull hide. His manner, always fine, was now tempered with the graciousness of a condescending host; the important commandant was thrust into the background, but not forgotten! oh, no! At times it peeped out like a painted actor from behind the curtain of his urbanity.

The four girls, like madame, were dressed in homespun of a plain indigo-blue color. Élise had contrived for them neckerchiefs of white lawn, such as the fair French queen wore, in which they were charming; she herself looking the stately court beauty; Suzanne a sprightly grisette; Jeanne a pious postulant; and Angèle a lovely picture.

Great fires of walnut logs and dry hickory, combining the delightful odor of their smoke into something like incense, roared in the wide fireplaces, outrivalling the flaming candles placed

everywhere. When 'Sieur Dubois opened his house for a fête it was well done! Nothing was spared!

The first arrival, like the first ant leaving the hill, brought the whole company pell-mell, singly, and in groups. Panis, at the door, relieved them of their sabots of sycamore wood (without which they could not hope to make their way through the deep mud of winter) and helped them on with their buskins of deer or bull hide.

The lowly pendants of the more exalted folk found their way into the kitchen, humbly content to share in anything savoring of gayety, a philosophy that helped them over many weary days and hard experiences.

Among the first arrivals was Lieutenant Bosseron from the fort, who brought with him a fine, towering young Virginian, Captain Bowman, by title and name. This young officer had been so taken with the stately charm of Élise, whom he had met when he called to deliver Clark's despatches to the colonel the day before, that he eagerly accepted Bosseron's invitation to accompany him, though the evening at the fort offered a merry prospect at piquet and tippling one of Helm's famous brews of apple-toddy.

When they urged Helm also to go, he only laughed, and said:—

“‘Every dog has his day!’ you young whelps must have yours I reckon!” and no persuasion would induce him to go.

When Bowman appeared, the stately Élise faltered and blushed like any other girl of twenty, and at this sign of softness the young soldier’s heart beat high with a desire to storm the strong fortress of her haughty reserve, while he bowed with perfect gallantry over her hand.

By six the company had all gathered, and Jeanne, who had the saving grace of a domestic turn, aside from a pious one, came to monsieur’s elbow and imparted something to him in a low voice.

He waved his hand to attract the attention of his guests, and said suavely, —

“My friends, we will repair to the kitchen, where all is in readiness for your amusement.”

At first there was a bashful hanging back; for they were on their best behavior at the commandant’s. Then some one plucked up courage to follow Monsieur Dubois, who had gallantly led out Madame Du Roc, the magistrate’s wife, a skinny, yellow little woman, whose tongue set every one a-writhing when it came his turn to be lashed by it. It was not altogether gallantry that had inspired monsieur’s choice; she was a person to conciliate!

All followed in a rush! the young people last, like the sweet residuum in a glass of negus, giggling and simpering, jesting and pushing; rude from a mixture of joyousness and timidity, bashfulness and a sense of freedom, their elders being well to the fore and not able to reprove them by softly spoken, bitter words, or sly pinches, they tumultuously crossed the space of ground to the kitchen.

Chloe, the black slave cook, stood by a table drawn well up to the hearth, her ebony face a-shine with the vigor of her efforts in beating the batter to frothing lightness, a great earthen bowlful of which stood ready for the contest. At hand stood three panis who were to be at the bidding of the guests. The hickory logs had burned to a point where a smart poke would tumble them into a fervid mass. Drawn to one side of the well-swept hearth was a flaming heap of coals, which a pani kept aglow by fanning with a wild-turkey wing; on top of it was placed a big iron griddle.

"Who will be bold enough to open the contest?" graciously inquired the host. There was another modest hiatus, then Louis Lutrell, the village wag and bottier stepped forward laughing:—

"I venture my *awl* upon it that I can toss higher than any here!" The company laughed politely at his well-worn joke.

He took from Chloe the big wooden spoon, whose bowl was full to overflowing with the golden batter, while one of the panis swabbed the griddle rapidly with a bit of fat pork on a fork. Louis dribbled a line of pale yellow dots across the clean white floor, but managed to spread a neat round cake on the griddle. He turned boastfully to the company, but alas for vanity! The odor of scorching assailed his nose. His cake was burned and he was barred from turning! A roar of laughing greeted his failure, and the cake was scraped off for the dogs.

Next came pretty Félice Boncour, who managed blushing to turn her cake, but it slipped from the knife-blade in a roll, which made the youngsters titter.

At this moment a diversion was made by the opening of the door, and the noisy entrance of the coureur, who had been away for many weeks.

Now, St. Vrain had come for the especial purpose of warning them of the coming of the British, whose heavy batteaux he had swiftly passed and had reached the town a little after Lancaster. But when he saw all this jollity, he

had not the heart to break in upon it with such dire news.

"Poor devils!" he said to himself, "it will come soon enough. St. Vrain will not be the one to distress his friends!" and he remained silent.

"Welcome, Monsieur St. Vrain, welcome!" arose on every hand.

"Monsieur le Comte, I welcome you heartily!" said the host, with much affability.

"I beg of you, monsieur not 'le comte' here among old friends! St. Vrain, le coureur de bois, at your service!"

"Let him try pancake turning! Now for the griddle, St. Vrain!" they clamored loudly.

"No, no! Not yet, my hand is stiff—eh—ah—with cold! I've but just dropped the oar. That alone would bring defeat!"

"Do you come from Detroit?" asked Colonel Dubois aside, not able to hide his anxiety, for he was in Helm's confidence.

"I come from the We-a towns, monsieur. All was quiet there!" evasively answered the coureur, and a curiously stubborn look replaced the smile on his lips. "But I would make my devoirs to the ladies, monsieur. Pardon!" And he retired, leaving the commandant baffled and disturbed.

St. Vrain's eye roved over the company, and after a time it found Ferriby out. She was seated on a wooden bench in a dusky corner, watching the gay scene rather wearily. He went to her, and said diffidently:—

“I am most pleased to see you again, after so long a parting, ma'm'selle!” He gazed at her wistfully, as if he had hoped for, and had failed to receive, some special sign of welcome from her.

“Have you been long away, monsieur?” she inquired with mild surprise.

“What an unkind question!” he exclaimed a little bitterly. “Is it possible you have not even known of my absence?”

“Yes, yes! monsieur. I remember now! But you know my mind is always busy with something I cannot quite recall. These dim memories trouble me day and night. They will not let me be happy! They made me forget even you, Hilaire, my best friend!”

St. Vrain looked sadly at her: “Let *me* make you happy!” almost broke from his lips; then he seated himself quietly at her side, when she artlessly made room for him.

“Sometimes I almost recall what it is I so long to remember; then it is gone, and does not come back for weary weeks to pain me as before.

Can't you tell me, monsieur, what so troubles me? You brought me here!"

"No, m'amie, not I," he said hastily, "I know no more about you than the princess did of the babe she found in the bulrushes!"

She smiled sadly, then threw off her mood of retrospection, and said with an attempt at brightness:—

"Why are you not joining in the sport? We all know that in everything he attempts, le comte"—and she smiled as she used his title for the first time—"comes out best."

"I am Hilaire, the coureur, here; nor do I succeed at all where most I wish to!" he replied almost testily.

The girl looked at him inquiringly. Urged by some impulse he could not control, he said in a low, agitated voice:—

"I mean I cannot make you care for me, Angèle!"

"Not care for you!" she echoed in surprise. "Am I not most beholden to you for life itself? Not care, monsieur! I'd be most ungrateful—as ungrateful as the wolf—did I not!"

He almost groaned as he turned away his face; Angèle seemed incapable of comprehending his state of mind. Too chivalrous to pursue one so

stricken, he gently thanked her and withdrew. He had gone but a few steps when he met gentle Jeanne coming toward him with a steaming glass of apple-toddy.

“Monsieur, I overheard you say that you had just arrived by the river. I fear you may suffer from a cold if you do not drink something heating.”

She handed him the toddy, which he drank without demur. It at once revived his dampened spirits; his gaze followed Jeanne when she bore away the empty glass, and he said to himself: —

“Too fine a maid for a cloister when she can so easily warm the heart of a man by a word” — with a grimace — “and a cup. There,” — nodding toward the listless Angèle, — “seems no hope! Why not rob the cloister?” and he laughed as he made his way to the hearth. In another moment a shout of merriment arose; for St. Vrain, with his left hand, had tossed a pancake highest and neatest, and it had returned, right side up, to the griddle, with a loud hiss.

Captain Bowman, standing on the opposite side of the hearth in silent attendance on Élise, observed to her: —

“I do not like the presence of that coureur fellow here. It forebodes nothing good to us! He seems a bird of ill-omen!”

Élise smiled, well content, for she attributed his words to jealousy. She looked up archly into the troubled face of the tall young Virginian, and said with pretended severity:—

“Oh, for shame! Afraid of the count! You’d make two of him!”

“Not in that way do I fear him, or any man, Miss Élise. I only mistrust that he may make you forget me! for this very night I return to Kaskaskia. But for the delay of the scouts in returning, I should even now be on my way. See how I trust you, whom I have seen but twice. What I have said must be a secret between us.”

Her glance fell, her proud face flushed, and she murmured in a tone enticingly gentle, humbly as a maid who feels the thrill of first love:—

“I am honored, Monsieur Captain, beyond my deserts, by your confidence, and shall keep it sacred.” She looked up earnestly into his deep blue eyes and fair face as he leaned over her from his great stature, with a new feeling softening her own black eyes, and coloring her dark cheek,—a look that roused him, and he half stretched out his hand, then drew it back, as there was a general movement toward the *salle à manger*. The kitchen reeked with the odor of

fried pancakes, and was blue with smoke of burned grease. The great bowl of batter was empty.

St. Vrain led the laughing procession by right of having tossed the pancake highest, carrying aloft a great steaming pile on a huge pewter platter, to be the *pièce de résistance* of the feast.

All were snugly seated, and the cakes and maple syrup were circulating, when at one and the same moment a gun boomed from the fort, and a soldier in a tattered American uniform burst into the room without ceremony.

"Lieutenant Bosseron, your presence is demanded at the fort! The British are in sight of the town by the river!"

All were struck with consternation. St. Vrain alone showed no surprise.

Bowman, cool and alert, approached the messenger before the awe-struck company rallied, and demanded in a low voice:—

"Have you anything for me?"

A letter was pushed into his hand, and before the British had hardly landed he was on his way to Kaskaskia, and to Clark.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE "HAIR-BUYER GENERAL"

THE second day after the capitulation of the fort and village, Hamilton required every inhabitant to renew his fealty to the British king. Either the failure of the militia to come to the aid of Helm mitigated Hamilton's severity toward them; or he had had orders from higher authority not to use extreme measures with a people easily placated by plausible promises and honeyed words.

Nevertheless, out of the reach of the long arm of authority, he required them to subscribe to the most humiliating oaths and allegations. The entire village of six hundred souls were compelled to repair to the little church and by word of mouth, or by sponsors, to abjectly confess that they had been very undutiful hitherto, and humbly to ask forgiveness of God and of their rightful sovereign, King George. A drastic draught this second dose of British bitters! But they swallowed it, not without the making of wry faces and heaving of stomachs.

Perhaps the worst punishment Hamilton inflicted was the hard labor he required of them. They were compelled to construct barracks for four hundred men; cut and dress logs, and erect two new blockhouses and a guard-house; alter and double the stockades, making them eleven feet high; build new batteaux; lay a foot of gravel all over the parade-ground; and sink two new wells. Strangely enough the fort had hitherto depended on a spring on the river bank. When all these improvements should have been finished (which labor would last well through the winter) "Sackville," as it was rechristened, would be stronger and better than before. But this enforced labor was the best possible means Hamilton could have taken to crystallize their atomic loyalty to the Americans. They paid in sweat for their defection. Helm had the satisfaction of seeing how they smarted under the humiliation of their position; and how surely Hamilton, while strengthening the fort, was weakening his influence over them.

General Hamilton was not a man of fine discernment, but even he saw, at last, that he had gone too far, and must regain their good-will by some means.

He shrewdly hit upon a plan most certain to

please these easily mollified villagers. He would give a ball on Christmas night in the new quarters, the interior of which was one vast room. His urbane mood reached a climax, when a foraging party of savages, headed by Ah-mah-nac-o, came in ¹ bringing with them eighty captives and one hundred and sixty-five scalps of their helpless victims; among them were the coarse locks of stalwart men, the long, thin, silvery tresses of old women, the brown silken curls of maidens, even the lint locks of babes!

He gave to these wretches the awards agreed upon, — taffia, blankets, powder, and shot, — and had the grisly spoils stowed away in some odd corner.

Very shortly after his arrival at the fort he had separated into small bands these five hundred Indians, who had formed the greater part of his army, and sent them on maurauding expeditions against the frontier, while the eighty white regulars and the twenty-one prisoners of war remained at the fort.

Lancaster standing by, in the light of the big log fire built on the parade-ground for the Indians, who hated the close confinement of quarters, beheld this ghastly trafficking with sickening horror,

¹ Haldeman Papers, Quebec Archives.

which gave place to rage. He could scarcely refrain from rushing upon the monster war chief, in whom he recognized Ah-mah-nac-o, snatching his hatchet and sinking it in his brain first, then in Hamilton's.

The red light from the fire, the wild savages, the accursed bartering, were as weirdly horrible as a scene in hell. The fiendish satisfaction of the savage, the satanic craft of the white men, — who in counting flung these pitiful human relics into a tangled heap on the ground like so many pelts of wolves or skunks, — were inhuman, devilish.

Lancaster's throat swelled and ached with a misery too great for tears. His blood rushed through his heart so fiercely as to nearly burst it. His teeth clinched. His muscles knotted, bracing for vengeful action, when a hand firmly gripped his shoulder.

"Caution! caution! boy. What is one tomahawk to fifty?" said a stranger to him, in a low voice.

"I will not bear it without striking a blow! Villains! murderers!—" and further speech was cut off by the same hand laid upon his lips.

"To what end is all this rage?" calmly asked the man whose hand had silenced him.

"To avenge those!" Lancaster pointed to the

pile of scalps, some of which lay matted with gouts of blood, scarcely cold; others dry like rustling parchment,—these latter they had obtained by trading with other tribes. One had fallen from the pile and lay spread out on the ground, without a stain, like a silvery aureole around a wintry moon,—an old, old woman's beautiful white hair. A savage kicked it upon the pile. Lancaster looked fiercely into his face; it was the Yellow Wolf. He sprang toward him, with a cry like the snarling of an animal, and snatched the silvery scalp.

A flouting voice called out in French:—

“Not so fast, my fine fellow. Would you have a love-lock? Take one of a color more in keeping with your years. This is his gracious Majesty's—King George's.” The man looked mockingly into Lancaster's twitching face. Lancaster glared at him, and recognizing him, snatched St. Vrain's own knife from his belt, and would have plunged it into the inhuman jester's heart. He flung up his hand clutching the knife for force to drive it home, but before it could descend he was whirled about and dragged away.

“You must have suffered cruelly, my lad, to so far forget yourself. Your life is at stake for attempting to strike one of Hamilton's mercenaries,

of all whom St. Vrain is prime favorite. It was lucky, indeed, that the general's back was turned, and that he saw you not, rash youth. Your chance would not have been worth a bad penny. You would have been brained like a mad wolf. St. Vrain, though a coureur in English pay, is a man of spirit and has a sense of fair play. Him we can trust."

"Suffered! Great God, how I have suffered!" burst out Lancaster, heedless of all but that one word in the man's long tirade. "We have been harried like wild beasts; driven before these red devils,—for what? Because we would seek a peaceful home in the wilderness; and our people would throw off the yoke of bondage to such as he!" pointing with bitter hate toward Hamilton.

"Be calm, my friend, be calm! You speak in extreme heat, under great provocation,—but it will not be overlooked on that account,—and with the bitter grief of a young heart. When it ages in such scenes, as mine has, you will learn to bear silently. God only knows how bitter the burden!" he muttered; then resumed aloud, "All Englishmen are not monsters such as he."

"Who are you that dare take his part?" demanded Lancaster, hotly.

"Are you an American?" questioned the man cautiously, by way of answer.

"Yes; and a prisoner to that inhuman wretch."

They had walked away to a considerable distance from where the trafficking was going on, but it was clearly visible to them in the firelight, while they were in shadow, and unnoticed in the stir and bustle.

"Moderate your wrath. I tell you it will do no good. It is a waste of power. Save yourself for a time when this energy, now squandered, will count. That will be soon!"

"Who are you, to speak so boldly?"

"I am Vigo, the trader, and I was captured in sight of the fort yesterday, and all my goods confiscated." He dropped his voice to the faintest tone. "But I am just come from Clark, commissioned to learn the strength of the fort. As a trader I will soon be discharged, for no incriminating papers will be found in my effects. My time is precious; you can be of great service. Once released I return to Clark. Then come what will."

Exultant joy kindled Lancaster's face. He turned a look of flaming hate on Hamilton; he whispered fiercely:—

"What *will* come, will be yonder inhuman fiend's ruin."

By this time the taffia was beginning to take effect, and the savages were making frightful din, weaving in and out in a wild dance about the fire. The garrison was absorbed in watching their wild gyrations, which to them were as welcome as a play, and under cover of the noise and excitement Vigo and Lancaster slipped into the dark shadows and thoroughly inspected the fort.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE CHRISTMAS FÊTE

THE evening of the fête the large cabinet adjoining the parlor in the Dubois mansion presented a ravishing picture. Two of the three demoiselles Dubois had spent the intervening days between the delivery of the invitation and Christmas night in an ecstasy of preparation. Even the dignified colonel had caught the infection sufficiently to have the large silver buckles on his shoes — once worn at the court of Louis XVI — polished to the highest lustre.

The last batteaux from Biloxi and New Orleans had brought ribbons and laces, silk stockings, sheer muslins, even flowery damassin, but, alas! only one pair of high-heeled slippers, long and slim; and, far more grateful to their girlish taste, a fashion book — only some ten months out of Paris itself! — which pictured, rudely enough, how the beautiful Queen Antoinette arrayed herself for such occasions. Therefore, in possession of the latest mode, the demoiselles Dubois

hoped to strike all beholders with wonder and admiration.

Élise, who had an instinct for dress amounting to a passion, had set to work snipping and cutting, fashioning and shaping with vigor; and the rewards were shown in the toilettes as exactly copied from her gracious Majesty's as their means would permit. The result was marvellous. It made one blink and think of magic, to behold three court ladies here, miles in the wilderness, with an Indian village across the river and a vast forest encircling the spot. Truly, woman's love of dress is an heritage of the sex, and one that has worked a deal of mischief in its day.

Élise, herself, looked like some grand marquise, in her sprigged damassin, looped up over a petticoat of white satin, through which ran threads of gold. It was a relic of her grandmother's finery. Her hair was piled high on a cushion, well powdered with starch, made under her own eye by the panis from crushed corn. She sported a star-shaped patch, cut from a bit of black taffeta, and stuck on with gum from the cherry tree.

Suzanne darted hither and thither, brilliant and facile as a humming-bird, in a silk gown of glimmering green shot with scarlet, a ruffle of lace around her plump shoulders, and wide sleeves

of the same falling back from her arms, which were of nearly the same ivory tint as the ancient web, — a priceless heirloom.

Jeanne refused such light, frivolous adorning, and appeared the novice she aspired to be, in a thin white muslin gown with white ribbons, about her neck a chain of gold, pendant from which was a cross studded with pearls. She looked the sweet, little white saint, and not a gleam of envy crossed her heart when she beheld the brilliant toilettes of her sisters. They, fully attired, were giving absorbed attention to the robing of Angèle, who submitted with her usual preoccupied air, half pleased, half indifferent. Their operations on her toilette had produced startling results, which surprised no one more than themselves. She was taller, fairer, slenderer than they, — so pale, indeed, that they had lightly touched the wan cheeks, still piteously hollowed, with a soupçon of rouge. Her eyes did not need the touch of black beneath the lower lid which Suzanne had thought necessary to hers. Her hair was piled in the exaggerated French court fashion and blanced with the starch till none of its natural color remained. A black patch was set guard over the dimple in her cheek, and gave her the charming touch of coquetry she had lacked.

Her gown was of diaphanous tissue, yellow as spring daffodils, and fell from her white shoulders, in the back, Watteau-fashion, with a fichu of white lace binding them round tenderly; its shining folds billowed to her feet over a yellow satin petticoat. To her share fell the slender high-heeled slippers, which had proved too long and narrow for the short, plump feet of Élise and Suzanne; they had to content themselves with sandals of pale buff doeskin, and kept hiding their feet under their gowns like strutting peafowls.

None, in their dreams of fancy flights, could have imagined Ferriby, the maid in linsey, the waif from the forest, to be the same being as the stately young woman in court costume. Madame *la* grandmère's ancient finery, in its pristine freshness, had never worked such miracles of loveliness. Angèle's stately carriage came from her extreme caution, her inaptness at walking on pegs of heels after having worn moccasins or sabots all her days.

The girls were exclaiming at her loveliness with characteristic effusiveness, Élise with the satisfaction of an artist, Suzanne with loving energy; but Jeanne only gazed with the rapture of a devotee — when Michael announced that the

calèshes were at the door, and that Monsieur the Colonel and madame, were weary with waiting. They took flight like gay birds.

The large officer's room at the fort had been cleared for dancing. The supper which would be most substantial, with few kick-shaws, would be served in the adjoining log house, near which the kitchen stood.

A slight sprinkle of snow had redeemed the year from having a "green Christmas," at which the French secretly rejoiced; for it augured that the little graveyard around St. Xavier's church would not fatten because of a "white" one.

The great fireplace was fed with logs as thick as a man's body, and glowed like a fiery furnace through the constant attention of the common prisoners and panis. There were many of these fires to be looked after, as the whole fort was hospitably thrown open, and it took two men to fetch in the logs for each. Their flaming helped out the illumination of sundry tallow dips hung about the room amid a festooning of Christmas greens, pillaged from the pines and hemlocks, miles away on the bluffs of Rivière Blanche.

General Hamilton and his aids, Major Hay and Captain Lamothe, were gorgeous in the scarlet

and gold of King George's troops. In the interval pending the arrival of guests they stood on the hearth, with their backs to the fire, coat-tails carefully parted, basking in the grateful heat. Bellefeuille, who held the most important post of interpreter, stood near by, yet apart; thus nicely defining his and his superiors' positions.

Lamothe, with characteristic Gallic finesse, was seemingly enjoying to the uttermost the rather heavy witticisms and coarse jests passing between Hamilton and Hay. While he barely understood a word, he instinctively knew when to laugh.

François Magnian, sergeant, was to act as master of ceremonies, announce the guests, and the like. Three fiddlers from the townsfolk were there to furnish the music. It was to be an imposing and elegant occasion, — one that would impress the volatile French with the complaisance and condescension of their British masters, and in a measure reconcile them to them.

"These prudish French lassies are worse than the old dames!" observed Hay, peevishly. "I hope we may not have to put in the evening piloting those mountains of flesh through dull minuets, instead of pairing with maids in sprightly galliards!"

"The little devils! They're scarcely civil! By heaven, those girls of Dubois's are rare ones!" said Hamilton.

"There's one they call Élise who has an itching to be a court dame, and will scarcely let her eye fall on a British officer!" growled Hay.

"And Jeanne, the demure one, has her eyes cast down constantly, as if telling her beads, and a man can't get so much as a flash from them to lighten his heart," complained Lamothe.

Hamilton and Hay burst into rude laughter at his sentimentality.

"Suzanne is a little romp, but, like fen-light, there's no laying a finger on her!" continued Lamothe, unruffled by their ridicule.

"How about the blonde, the 'white angel'?" questioned Hamilton.

"She's no French girl!" said Hay, emphatically. "Snow she is! Soot they are compared to her."

"Ha, ha! Major Hay waxes soft!" jeered Hamilton. "Next he'll —" But Sergeant Magnian broke in upon his speech by announcing in a loud, important voice, —

"Monsieur le Colonel Dubois, madame, and the demoiselles Dubois!" There was a dropping of negligent attitudes. A sharp thrill

of surprise pricked the hosts. They could scarcely believe their eyes. Their wits nearly forsook them, when a troop of fair ladies, fine as court beauties, swept toward them, with dignified ease and grace, and paused to drop a stately courtesy, as their hosts met them halfway.

The men were visibly impressed by the splendor of their toilettes, as men ever are, and a slight but telling change came over their demeanor.

The tinge of freedom and patronage faded from their manner, and their courtesy was all the most exacting could demand. But before greetings were ended, in rushed a lively crowd of guests, who in turn, gaped and stared, grew silent and awkward in the face of such surprising magnificence. The women were uneasy at the violent contrast to their own toilettes. The men, open-mouthed and sheepish, admired and wondered. Soon the fiddlers set all right. Then feet went trippingly to the measure of the gay galliard, the reel, and the country-dance. At last came the minuet, that dance which savors of courts and stately beauty.

Now Suzanne, bringing all her ingenuity to bear, had learned that dance out of a book; for on her feet she was as light as a canoe on the water, a cloudlet in the sky, a leaf in the wind.

Such smooth gliding, such ease of motion, such wild gyrations as she was capable of would put a première danseuse to shame. It was her one great talent. She had impressed every one in the family necessary to carry out her purpose, and had trained them with unflagging zeal and tireless patience. This was to be her triumph, for no one else could dance the minuet. With tears in her eyes she had entreated Jeanne for once to lay aside her scruples, and Jeanne had yielded.

Madame had obeyed Suzanne's mandate and had tried to recall the art of her youth, with much prompting by the mistress of the dance; for Angèle utterly failed to learn it. Suzanne felt certain Hay and Lamothe, even burly Hamilton, could compass the minuet with good partners to guide them. Élise was to be the partner of the general; for Hamilton, who was a stickler for etiquette, when he had asked of her the honor had not counted on madame the "mountain" dancing. Thus she had fallen to Hay. Every one instinctively bent to Élise as the most important woman in the company. Suzanne was appropriated by the sprightly Frenchman, Lamothe.

Jeanne was left unprovided. The sergeant was sent about the room in quest of any one who could fill the vacant place; for the affair was to

no small extent democratic, and the strict demarkation of caste could not be observed. He stumbled on St. Vrain in the midst of a lively party playing cards in a tiny adjoining room, cleared out for the occasion.

“Come, St. Vrain; you’ve been at court for aught any one knows, and must make one of this new-fangled dance Ma’m’selle Suzanne is so set upon!”

“Must I dance with the ice-maiden Angèle?” he asked with a wry grimace.

“No!” laughed the sergeant, “the little nun falls to you.”

“That’s a new experience! I’ll make her forget her vows!”

“Come! come! the general waits; what is worse, the haughty Élise! Can you dance?”

St. Vrain walked to the open door of the little cabinet, glanced down the long room where the couples were waiting, and said reluctantly, “Yes, I can.”

“Come, then! It’s the general’s orders!”

The fire had burned low, and as the set formed, Lancaster came in with a great arm-load of wood. He, as were all prisoners of rank lower than officers, was treated as a menial and compelled to do the work of servants, and he had been ordered

to feed the fire in the ball-room. He piled the fuel on generously, and watched the flames braid through the interstices till it was well ablaze; then he turned to go. But too late! The low, slow measure of the fiddles warned him that the dance had begun! None would notice him if he stood quietly near the fire; for prisoners and panis were scattered about everywhere.

As he leaned against the jamb of the door leading into the little cabinet, Lancaster was caught, like all the silent spectators, by the quaint beauty of the pictorial scene, — the eager faces of those standing against the rough log wall watching the slow, stately movement, the sweeping courtesys of the eight dancers in the firelight.

The flames danced and flashed over the shimmering satins and filmy chiffons of the ladies; the brilliant, gold-laced, scarlet uniforms of the officers, and the unique costume of the coureur. He was arrayed in his best, — a suit of fresh, pale-yellow doeskin, a silken sash of vivid crimson about his waist. His jerkin was richly embroidered with shells, beads, and stained porcupine quills. His black hair was gathered into a queue with a black ribbon. His slender feet trod the measure noiselessly in moccasins, a crust of bead embroidery. His evolutions were perfect, his demeanor



“ Watching . . . the sweeping courtesies of the dancers.”



that of one well used to the dance. And when at its close he gave his arm to Jeanne with the grace and courtesy of one habituated to the niceties of the ball-room, some shook their heads knowingly, because others had ever thought him only a *coureur de bois*!

To one of Lancaster's melancholy mind, this scene soon lost interest. He looked about him, his eye travelling vaguely over the company. It fell on Helm, and for a moment his mind dwelt on the remarkable friendship which existed between the prisoner captain and the general his captor. Helm's coolness and impudence in outwitting him seemed to have caught Hamilton's fancy, and he was treated with the indulgence of a friend.

Here he was at the ball, dancing like the most favored guest, and was now standing with his late partner, looking on at the minuet. Lancaster's glance moved to her face,—the face of Angèle! He started forward eagerly, then fell back as one does when he thinks he sees a friend in a strange crowd, to find, with a pang at heart, that he knew him not! Was it only false twang on some string of memory? Her height, was it not a little more than that of Ferriby?—was not the figure less rounded? Her eyes were downcast,

but the wide sweep of veined lid with its long fringing of golden brown was exact in its resemblance to hers ! The contours of face and figure are unfamiliar, decked out in the extremest French mode. The girl's manner, too, had a cold, calm repose, an ungirlish apathy. Such finery his Ferriby could never flaunt. Such lifeless composure his bright, quick, impulsive sweetheart could never acquire. By nature she had the glancing, warming loveliness of sunshine ; the disquiet of the aspen leaf. Her joyousness set her to flashing with smiles, and to dancing with the nimbleness of a fawn. This cold, still creature, why did she so cause him to recall her ?

As he looked, his heart beat faster, a pang of pain contracted his throat so that he felt he must cry out or leave the place. But he could not go. The fair one had cast a spell upon him which kept him there, staring till his eyes ached. He remained to the last deep genuflection of the dancers.

At once the silent crowd became animated, a romping country-dance began, and Lancaster saw the tall, pale beauty about to join it. On his way to the door he came very near her, and stared so steadily at her that the French lieutenant Lamothe, her escort, spoke harshly, one word : " Be-

gone!" She turned instantly, but Lancaster was hurrying through the outer door.

As St. Vrain led Jeanne down the long room, he said with his accustomed audacity:—

"You have given me a new and delightful sensation, ma'm'selle! I have shot the rapids of the great St. Lawrence; I have hunted the buffalo; I have found the wildest retreats of the deer in the forest, and killed the primest duck; I have played the muskallonge in the northern lakes; but never, no never! did they inspire me with such feelings as this dance has done; such an experience as this has been, have I never met before!"

Jeanne's eyes opened wide and fixed upon him in astonishment amazed at his extravagant speech, as he meant she should be, but she said nothing in reply.

"You do not ask why?— Because I have danced with a would-be nun! When you are in the cloister, you, too, ma'm'selle, will think of this dance!"

"Sir!" she remonstrated half frightened.

"Yes!— They tell me, ma'm'selle, that you, with your bright eyes— yes— I've seen them, though too often cast upon the insensate puncheons— and your satiny hair, are to become a sacrifice to the cloister! robbed from the hearthstone!"

"Sir! You speak most strangely!" said Jeanne, troubled.

"'Tis because I feel most strangely, here!" and he laid his hand upon his heart.

"Is it a sudden megrim?" asked Jeanne, innocently.

The coureur groaned softly at her imbecility. "'Tis likely to become so, if you persist in this wicked notion!"

"Wicked! monsieur — to devote one's self to the church?"

"Yes! The church has many devotees, homely ones, and needs not this flower of the wilderness. Many a man here would pluck it and wear it on his heart forever!"

He watched the slow blush mount to her forehead, and a frightened look come over her face. She drew her arm from his, and with quick, light steps sought her mother's side, trembling, and almost panting.

St. Vrain looked after her, smiled behind his hand, and said to himself: "'Tis enough for this once! 'Twill give her new food for thought. Yonder fair American maid is not for me, it seems, although I found her. The law of the finder in this case holds not good!" and he sighed lustily. Then he brightened wonderfully as he smelled

the hot apple-toddy the panis were serving out to the guests, and the wafts of appetizing vapor that told supper was in preparation. The odor of roasted wild turkey and broiled venison were sufficient to cheer any man's blasted heart!

Supper over, the elders settled in pairs and quartets to play at piquet, écarté, and whist, and the younger ran hither and thither in frolicking games, — "Twirl the Trencher," "Blindman's Buff," and the like.

Lancaster and two other prisoners had been recalled, and set as guards against the maids' running into the fire. He performed his service but ill, for his eyes constantly sought out the stately maid in yellow, whom he had overheard the amorous young Frenchmen call "*Angèle blanche*," and the Englishmen, the "snow maid," with such strange yearnings at heart, such unaccountable drawings toward her! She did not join in the boisterous fun, but looked on and smiled at the wild merriment in a dreamy way, as if her spirit roamed afar. Her eyes rarely wandered or brightened with interest.

A tumbling brand claimed Lancaster's attention, and he was instantly conscious that *Angèle* had left the room during that interval of not more

than a moment. She and Suzanne had slipped into the little cabinet to evade the outstretched arms of the "blind man," who in hot chase after Suzanne had invaded her corner.

Panting and laughing, Suzanne said, "Let us rest here a moment, Angèle; my breath's all but gone," and both sank to blocks of wood provided for seats.

"I'm tired of it all, Suzanne, and am glad to slip away," Angèle replied, while sadness fell over her great blue eyes. "I do not know, Suzanne, why I feel so dull a weight here,"—laying her hand upon her breast,— "as if I must throw off a heavy barrier that holds me back from something. *What* is it? what is it?"

"Peste! You are only tired, my Angèle. Too much merriment has wearied you. Rest quietly here a moment, and I'll amuse myself among Monsieur Hamilton's trophies."

On one side of this little cubbyhole rough shelves ran from floor to ceiling, and on them were stored parts of accoutrements, spurs with huge rowels, dried roots, Indian bows and arrows, and such odds and ends as men collect. Suzanne's prying eyes spared nothing, and as she stooped to look under the lowest shelf, she exclaimed:—

“Le bon Dieu! what have we here! A buffalo hide?” And she plunged her hand deep into a dark mass, clutched what her fingers could hold, and laughingly drew out—a scalp!

Ferriby turned dull, wearied eyes toward her, but when she beheld the trophy, which Suzanne still clutched as if unable to drop it, her eyes widened with terror; she gasped for breath; struggled to rise, and plunged across the short space between them. She tore the scalp from the fingers of the horror-struck Suzanne, pressed the long, silken, white locks, matted and filthy with dried blood, to her breast, and shrieked one wild shriek after another. Suzanne thought her mad and rushed to the door for help, just as those nearest it burst in appalled. Lancaster was first to reach her, and caught the shrieking girl to his breast, and the silvery scalp slid to the floor, down the length of her satin gown. In another moment she was taken from him to the motherly bosom of madame, and hurried away from the scene.

The fête ended in wild confusion. After all had dispersed and quiet had settled down, Hamilton and Hay went into the little cabinet to learn the cause of the girl's terror. The white scalp on the floor told the story.

“ The cursed fools, to leave them here! That impish Suzanne found them, of course,” and he pushed it carelessly with his foot into the corner with the others.

CHAPTER XXXIV

MIDWINTER

AFTER Ferriby had been borne tenderly home from the fête, every torture memory could inflict was hers. Suzanne, Jeanne, and madame sat by her side the remainder of the night. Her mind emptied itself of all its ghastly stowage; a ceaseless stream of words, low and monotonous, like one talking in sleep, fell from her lips, as if some power outside of her own will called upon her to speak. It seemed as if suspended memory had lost sight of everything between those days of horror and those of peacefulness.

Every act passed in review, every horrid experience was lived over again. They feared for her reason.

The discovery of the snowy scalp, madame regarded as a horrid coincidence, but Jeanne and Suzanne, with the swift conviction of youth, believed as Ferriby did, that it was that of her grandmother. Their tears streamed when she told of her parting from her lover in the clearing,

destined to be so lasting. They sobbed aloud when she recounted the awful massacre in the cabin. They shuddered with terror when she related the story of her capture and lonely wanderings in the wilderness. They trembled at the fearfulness of it, and wept with the pity of it. They blessed St. Vrain for his tender humanity, and Jeanne had much trouble thereafter to keep thoughts of him from intruding on her pious meditations. Suzanne sobbed out, "I'll always love him as a dear brother!"

Madame, with calmer judgment, was inclined to believe her revelation to be the flighty maundering of one fever-stricken.

At daybreak Ferriby's babblings fell into silence. She subsided into a calm as fearful as her ravings, and a weakness fell upon her so piteous it sent Suzanne weeping, Jeanne praying, from her bedside; for it seemed that Death would claim all that grief had left of vitality.

After a fortnight of alternate hope and despair on the part of her watchers, strength came creeping back, and with it perfect recollection of the past.

Her story did not become generally known; for it was not thought wise to inflame the minds of the villagers by a repetition of such atrocities,

at least until proof had established that they were not the hallucinations of one suddenly upset by fright, which was the generally accepted theory of her sudden illness.

But Colonel Dubois quietly set on foot a search for her people and for confirmation of her story, by the aid of hunters and trappers.

Hamilton believed Ferriby's fright arose from the shock of finding so ghastly an object; and for excellent reasons said no more about the unlucky affair.

After the holidays the villagers settled down to their midwinter tasks and pastimes. The trappers were abroad slaying their victims, because winter hides brought so many more shillings than the "salted down" hides of warm weather. The nobler animals also were slaughtered mercilessly: huge saddles of venison were "cured," as well as the choicer parts of the buffalo, for summer consumption.

Bands of savages roamed back and forth through the Illinois country, harrowing the frontier, and returning to the fort to be paid for their spoils. No messengers were able to get through to Virginia that winter, thanks to the murderous vigilance of the English mercenaries.

Clark was wearing his life out at Kaskaskia in

anxious expectation of aid from Virginia, which he never received.

Lancaster still a prisoner, chafing and fretting, despairing and maddened, was kept busy early and late, hewing, sawing, digging, unwillingly bearing a part in the improvement of the fort.

He had never again seen the pale girl who had so mysteriously moved him, except in dreams. Nor had he heard more of her than that she was one of Colonel Dubois's daughters. While his physical condition improved and strengthened daily, by his outdoor labor, in spite of himself, his mind was slowly settling into a hopelessness bordering on melancholia.

Not the slightest opportunity for escape presented itself. At night he slept surrounded by Hamilton's regulars; by day he worked with them, constantly guarded. The eternal surveillance and helplessness of his situation was driving him to despair.

By the aid of cards and dice, taffia and brandy, and the companionship of Lamothe and Hay, Hamilton managed to get through the heavy days. Even Helm, who was a prime favorite with all, was called upon to lighten the dragging hours. His odd humor amused the duller witted Hamilton. His brazen audacity and unquenchable

spirits kept them on the alert, wondering what he would say or do next; he was an irreverent godsend in that dull hole. But all these slow hours were not passed in frivolity by Hamilton. Many were secretly employed in formulating plans for his early spring campaign against the American frontiersman, which, for his means, was to be on a large scale, — one of merciless, vigorous carnage. He had *carte blanche* to do as he pleased, and his pleasure was infamous.

His plans were fully made, and only lacked opportunity to be set in motion, when he was balked by a power he could in no wise control — the operations of nature. Weeks of rain, a January thaw, set in, which lasted well into the middle of February. The improvements in the fort were all but completed. A terrible ennui fell upon him. Time dragged like an ox-cart through bottomless prairie mud. He bitterly regretted the display of petty arrogance which had caused him to destroy the two billiard tables at the tavern; they would now have served their turn at diversion from the terrible impatience which seized him. He eagerly used every chance to lighten the time; held drinking-bouts in his own private quarters, and attended those given by Hay and Lamothe in theirs.

In his extremity he even accepted invitations from Helm, to whom he had assigned comfortable quarters in a small log house near his own; and to whom, while carefully guarded, he accorded great freedom within the precincts of the fort.

Helm came and went much as he pleased, but his range was confined to six acres, bounded on all sides by a stout stockade of oak and hickory saplings, eleven feet high, set double.

His unabating cheerfulness, his "quips and cranks," his resource in inventing new amusements from very small means, had made him a refuge from dulness to Hamilton. Therefore it was with pleasure and satisfaction that he accepted an invitation from Helm to spend a drizzly evening in his cabin.

Shortly after candle-lighting, when he had eaten his coarse rations and had smoked a pipe, Hamilton took himself off to enjoy the pleasant company of his hostile host, and a friendly game at piquet with him.

CHAPTER XXXV

A GAME OF PIQUET

It was a muggy night after a period of drizzling, wet days when the grass had been soaked from dull green (for it had been an "open" winter) to the duller brown of ultimate decay, to which nature brings everything, animal and vegetable, high and low, at last.

The mud in the fort grounds would have been knee deep but for Hamilton's timely application of gravel. The sky was lowering and thick with mist that needed but a waft of colder wind to distil it into drops, as a peevish child melts to tears at the one trifle too much.

It was eminently a night for pleasure indoors, and Hamilton vaguely pitied the unlucky wight who had business out; as he heard the dull tread of the sentries, and thought of Lamothe, whom he had sent off that morning on a scouting expedition. When he reached Helm's quarters he found pleasant company, and he threw off his cloak and hat without waiting for his host (who called out a

cheery greeting) to rise from an occupation that promised much. Helm was crouched over the hearth, in the full heat of the fire, though not in need of warming, as his flaming face testified.

He was watching a row of red-cheeked apples fade in the glow, like rosy girls in the perfervid fire of life, into an ugly brown, all their lusty color scorched from them as he turned them slowly before the hot bank of coals. When the odor of pleasant juices reached him, Hamilton sniffed unctuously as a cat sniffs catnip. He drew near the hearth, and placing himself to one side where he could watch the agreeable task of his host, rubbing his chill hands, smacking his lips, he remarked:—

“If I mistake not all the signs, Helm, we are in for one of your incomparable brews. Eh?”

“I design nothing else, general, though most soldiers in my case would prefer a ‘brew’ of another sort!” he replied, with a scarcely perceptible straying of the eye toward Major La Grasse and Captain Bosseron, paroled residents of O Poste, who at that moment entered together, coming in from the town.

Bellefeuille, the interpreter, answered to Helm’s remark.

“Small chance of any other kind this night,

captain, unless it be of rain, — which *le bon Dieu* avert! We have had more than a stomach full of that!”

All the guests, but the newcomers, were gathered about the table dicing. Hamilton retired from the fireside and seated himself apart from the others at the extreme end of the table, a long slab of puncheon, and fell to sorting over a pack of cards, preparatory to getting satisfaction out of Helm for his last defeat at piquet, by that worthy. He counted aloud absently, “ace,” “deuce,” “tray,” as he threw them into two piles.

Hay sat on a corner of the table, idly swinging his foot in the pauses of the game he was engaged in, watching intently each step of the toddy making.

Bosseron approached the hearth, his back to the rest, and stretched out his hands to the blaze to warm them. As he did so Helm glanced up casually at him and met a look so meaning, so triumphant, he read it, with the intuition of a woman, as a message of import. Tact silenced his lips, but his eyes flashed the question, “Good news?”

Bosseron’s lips silently formed the word “Yes.”

The next moment his interest centred on his row of apples, now done to a turn, their thin skins

bursting, showing the foamy white inside. With a hand that trembled slightly he nicely blended the brandy, water, sugar, and spice (a modicum of dried sassafras and spice-wood bark doing duty), turned it into the great iron brewing cup, and thrust the long nozzle into a bed of living coals well inside the fireplace. He hung over it as solicitously as a young mother over a sick babe, but managed meantime to keep up a volley of chaffing with his guests. Noticing Hamilton's occupation, he cried :—

“Don't hope to beat me at piquet, general. By the Eternal! I've come to think my victory over you foreordained.”

This “double entente” was not lost on La Grasse and Bosseron, who smiled broadly.

Hamilton glanced up from the cards and said somewhat testily, —

“Destiny in battle is not foretold by a pack of dirty cards, begad!”

“Spoken like a soldier. No! by Heaven, 'tis by courage, endurance in the face of every difficulty and danger. God prosper the right!”

Hamilton looked surprised at this outburst, and remarked dryly :—

“This post is rather a hard billet, but I've no reason to complain except for this cursed dul-

ness. Much I owe you, Helm, for becoming my prisoner."

There was a very slight emphasis on the last word.

"And I you for being my guest," Helm replied, with irresistible bravado, which puzzled the Frenchmen and made the Englishmen laugh.

"Besides, it will be livelier soon," said Hamilton, with unmistakable meaning.

"I doubt it not," acquiesced Helm, nonchalantly, turning to his brew. He lifted it to a hotter bed, and was just settling it to his satisfaction when there was a crack from a gun, a rattle, and a great lump of dried mud fell down the chimney and splashed into the mixture. Helm started back to get out of the cloud of hot aromatic steam. The vessel had turned sideways and had spilt most of the posset on the fire; but he carefully righted it, skimmed off the mud, and roared out:—

"By the God of heaven, gentlemen, that's Clark's soldiers. And they'll take your fort. But," he added whimsically, "they ought not to have spoiled this apple-toddy!"¹

Dice turned up double sixes in vain. Cards were flung to the wind. Hamilton rushed to the

¹ Verbatim.

parade ground, followed by all but Helm. Balls whistled about his ears. A sergeant fell, shot dead. An instant more and the drums sounded a wild alarm,—the fort was roused. For a brief space there followed a state of seeming confusion, then the well-disciplined men were in position,—gunners and swabbers at the cannon; musketeers at the port-holes; lights out.

At the first alarm a detail had rushed forward to barricade the gate toward the church, when, to their consternation, it burst open. It was only McBeth, the post surgeon, who entered in furious haste, and with him a slight stripling, wrapped closely in a long, black cloak. It was intensely dark, so that no notice was taken of the surgeon's companion. The gate crashed to, and the huge oak barriers, which no ordinary battering-ram could break, were put in place. The Americans under Clark—for he it was who had spoiled the posset—had crept close under the palisades and lay eleven feet below the ports, out of range of the British guns, so that the shot fell foul or shattered the houses in the village. Clark had surrounded the fort on the three land-sides so stealthily that the first hint of the presence of the Virginians was given by the shot that sent the bit of clay into the apple-toddy.

The surgeon was summoned to Hamilton, who closely questioned him, and in the turmoil his companion fled away into the darkness.

Helm and the handful of prisoners were forgotten in the suddenness of the attack, and the wild excitement following upon it. His quarters were deserted of all who had been his guests but a short ten minutes before. Mild domestic peace had given place to fierce, cruel war. Helm stood by his hearth, tranquilly sipping a glass of the scalding toddy, now and then blowing upon it to cool it, and listening to the din noising outside.

"I'm neither a prophet, nor the son of a prophet! But, by the Eternal! I was right that time!"

He swallowed a draught in silent toast, and smacked his lips loudly in appreciation of the merits of both the prophecy and the brew.

"Captain Helm!" cried a low, eager voice at the door. He turned quickly as a slight figure glided into the space illumined uncertainly by the dying fire. He grew pale, and stared awe-struck, for he thought what he saw was a spirit.

The intruder threw off its cloak.

"For God's sake! How did you get here, girl? Tell me!" he cried. When it had dawned on him that it was no spirit he saw, but a woman

in flesh and blood, — the girl he knew as Angèle Dubois.

“No one would venture to pass the sentinels on account of their oath of allegiance. I am not a Frenchwoman, and owe the English nothing of loyalty. I am an American! My duty is to my own people! Since dark fell, I have waited near the gate for a chance to enter the fort. Disguised by Colonel Dubois’s great cloak, I easily slipped by the guard with a soldier coming in, and was not challenged.”

“True pioneer grit! With women as bold, determined, and brave as the men, our cause should succeed!”

“It will; for Clark landed on Warrior’s Island near sunset this afternoon!”

“I thought as much when he spilled my toddy! The man is more than human to have done it. Was ever such resolution as Clark’s?”

“I determined to warn you, that you might aid him by any means in your power, or that you might escape to him. One such tried man as you is worth a hundred now!”

Helm thought deeply a few moments, and said: “Escape is impossible! I can’t think of a way to help just now; but the long rifles of the ‘Big Knives’ will soon make one for me, I dare swear!

That don't bother me much! It's what to do with you!"

"Now I'm here, I must stay," said the girl, coolly. "The gates are barricaded, Clark has surrounded the fort. He's certain to take it. I'll be no hindrance to you; I'll look out for myself! Go to your duty without a thought of me!"

"You're safe enough behind these logs. The rifle-balls of the Americans can't pierce through them. Besides, the attack comes from the other three sides." Helm paused to listen while cannon bellowed and rifles rattled shot like hail. "You'll not be afraid, my girl?" he asked anxiously.

"No, no! not for a moment! Don't stay for me!"

"Spoken like a true American maid!"

A quiet now ensued, so perfect that the angry rush of the river, full to the brim, not fifty feet back of Helm's cabin, could be distinctly heard. Then followed a mighty blare of cannon, shrill cries, and loud huzzahs,—the tremendous harmony of battle!

The loud cheers roused Helm. They were the blended voices of his old comrades, as he well knew. He ran to the nearest blockhouse in the thick of it, the one overlooking the church. He mounted the ladder and stood by the grimy

gunner as he rammed home the charge and touched off the vent. The flame leaped outward. The ball sped with a sharp hiss; the gunner peered on the instant through the embrasure. His shadow fell across it. Ping! a bullet sang. He fell dead! Before his shot had reached its aim a musket-ball had pierced his breast.

"It's the Virginians, no doubt after that!" said Helm, proudly. "They are the only soldiers that can shoot at a shadow and kill a man!"

Without hesitation, the man swabbing out the bore of the gun took the dead man's place, pushing to one side with his foot the out-flung arm of the gunner that he might not tread upon it. He bent forward. Before he could ram home the charge, a bullet bored through his skull near the corner of the eye.

"By all the fiends of hell! these fellows shoot at your shadow and leave you a shade," muttered Helm, looking down at the slain men. "I must have a care that I'm not plugged myself! But this fellow mustn't be silent. He can only tell tales, as Pat would say, by keeping still!" He dragged the dead out of the way.

"Now for a turn at his Majesty's powder! If Lancaster were only here, 'twould be a God's blessing!"

He stepped to the ladder-way and called loudly in a pause in the uproar — "Lancaster!"

The reply was a rush of feet up the ladder, and Lancaster stood near him, directly in front of the deadly embrasure.

"Hell! boy. Not there!" and Helm's brawny hand dashed the youth to one side just as a swift bullet shrilled through the space he had occupied. "They shoot like devils, nor miss their mark!" was Helm's sole comment. "Beware of darkening the port, for that's what they aim at!"

Lancaster glanced at it carelessly, then said, "You want me?"

"Yes; help me with this gun, boy. I'm mighty unhandy at these roarers. With my long-barrelled rifle I can shoot with the best of them!" A smart fusillade from the north seemed to applaud his boast.

"You don't mean —" stammered Lancaster, appalled.

"No, I don't, you fool! But this gun's got to holler with the rest! Noise won't kill!"

Lancaster instantly grasped his intention, and continued to swab the gun till the water in his bucket was black and grimy. They served it with tremendous charges of powder; but the shot pile was undiminished. If noise could

have killed, then half of Clark's army had been slain!

None within the fort was the wiser for the good service they two rendered the Americans that night, wasting the king's powder and saving the king's shot.

The air was swart with smoke! The rayless darkness was lit momentarily into horrid brilliancy by flamings of cannon, and from every port-hole to the east rifles flashed a narrow jet of fire.

Each impotent volley from within was received with jeers and taunts by the Americans without. Clark's men were firing intermittently; now and again their long squirrel-rifles carried swift death within through every crack and crevice. Outside the fort, intermingled with the noise of battle, were sounds of chopping, followed by a crash; dull blows were succeeded by the ripping apart of timbers. But to those within the fort worse than all these were the periods of perfect quiet, lasting but a few moments, but to their strained and anxious ears seeming to be hours long.

They set the nerves a-quiver; the teeth a-chatter with dread of what might come next. The besiegers were so close under the stockade their movements could not be seen. They slipped like

shadows following the sun, from one point to another, and after an interval of racking suspense the attack would come from a new quarter. Then swivels must be turned, cannon shifted, to meet the new attack. After volley-firing would come, at long intervals, the deadly single shots of the sharp-shooters, when the shadow of some incautious, curious gunner darkened the port for an instant, peering out to behold — death! Scarcely a missent shot was fired by Clark's men.

Hamilton pervaded the fort, cool and brave. But he was secretly chagrined to have been caught napping by an army of backwoodsmen, such as he conceived Clark's to be. He was a good officer and knew what his men were about. When the cannon in the southwest blockhouse rang out sharply and regularly, he gave no further attention to it, for he was needed elsewhere.

At last the blackness of the long night began to yield to the graying of dawn. Trembling shafts of light began to part the curtain of smoke and let the morning in. The Americans seemed to have withdrawn; their rifles were quiet after a terrible night of action. The cannon in the fort paused as if to catch breath. The dominant sound was the rush of the river, muddy and swollen, which spread wide on the farther shore to

the very lodges of the Piankeshaws. A diversion occurred. An Indian scout managed to find an unguarded spot on the riverside, and scaled the pickets of the stockade like a squirrel.

He approached Hamilton, and reported that Lamothe was hovering near with his scouting party, in hope of entering the fort. The general ascended to the upper story of the blockhouse and swept the horizon with his glass. No enemy was in sight ! Elated by this extraordinary chance for reënforcements, Hamilton descended to the parade-ground and ordered over the ladders.

Lamothe and his squad, who had hidden in a barn near by, in furious haste swarmed to the top of the ladder, and with wild bounds leaped from the top of the stockade into the enclosure ; a few, in their eagerness, fell back outside.

The Americans, peeping from their ambuscade, saw the last one over. A hoarse shout of derision told the enraged Hamilton that he had been outgeneralled once more. The reason was only too plain ; the Americans were not strong enough to engage more than one party at a time. At once their firing recommenced, fiercer than ever.

The wan light proved truly the beginning of another day. The sun appeared a glittering blotch on a dull gray sky and gradually pene-

trated the sulphurous smoke that hovered over the fort. With the day's return was revealed to Hamilton the true significance of the dull blows and crashings heard in the night. Three hundred yards before the gate, toward the village, the Americans had thrown up a barricade of trees and earth, and were strongly intrenched behind it. They had pulled down the adjacent barns and cabins, leaving a broad space between the fort and village. How they could have accomplished all this and have kept up so galling a fire amazed Hamilton. His wonder would have increased had he known that these 154 men stood up to the work after a march of fifteen days of incredible hardship, the last week up to the arm-pits through water over the Drowned Lands, covered for six miles by the overflow of the Ouibache; and that, after eating the first full meal they had had for six days, wet, ragged, wayworn, without a thought of rest, they had commenced the attack and kept it up so hotly all night that he was put on his mettle with his fresh troops to meet it. The invincible, unconquerable spirit of the Americans might have warned him and his compatriots of the inevitable outcome of the struggle, not only here but in the colonies.

Hamilton strongly suspected that the villagers

had given aid. Clark forbade them to take part in the assault; but they had indeed been of great assistance, melting pewter utensils into bullets, felling trees, tearing down buildings, throwing up earthworks, and above all, by unearthing a goodly store of buried powder.

The Americans seemed indeed insensible to fatigue. With the return of day they renewed the assault with unabated energy. Now it was at the price of life a figure passed before a port-hole. Ping! spoke the bullet. Death answered.

Helm, stripped to the waist, grimy and sweating, sorely puzzled, had watched each move of Clark's with amazement. But he knew the wonderful sagacity of the man, and had perfect faith in him, while he had not the clew to his actions. He dully wondered what would be his next move. But even he, man of strong faith, was unprepared for it.

Another appalling silence fell, significant of fresh disaster; and Hamilton, well convinced his weakened garrison could not stand to the guns much longer, ascended to the top of the southwest blockhouse, — for the enemy had shifted to that quarter, — and anxiously used his glass. He almost dropped it in bewilderment; for he saw a man approaching the gate bearing a white flag.

CHAPTER XXXVI

AT LAST!

THE sudden cessation of firing caused much incautious peering from loopholes; those overlooking the village were crowded.

Eager to learn the cause, Ferriby left Helm's cabin, where she had spent the fearful night. She crossed to the blockhouse, and climbed the ladder to the upper floor, where he was blithely wasting powder.

The dead gunner and his mate lay stark in the corner out of harm's way, though, poor wretches, in an earthly sense, harm could come to them no more.

The furious excitement with which Lancaster had served the gun abated with the silencing of the battery. Horrible weakness overcame him. He swayed from side to side, then pitched face downward to the floor, while blood streamed from his mouth. As he fell, an arm struck Helm, whose face was pressed against the embrasure. The blow startled him; he turned and cried out wofully, —

"God of heaven! the boy is killed."

He threw himself down by Lancaster and raised his head upon his knee. Robert's staring eyes happened to be gazing toward the ladder-way, when Ferriby's shoulders reached the level of the floor. Helm's whole attention was taken up with the wounded man.

"Am I in heaven?" murmured Lancaster, dreamily, feebly raising his head. "At last I have found you, my Ferriby!" A mouthful of blood choked his utterance, and he sank back with the sudden fall of the lifeless against Helm.

The bluff old soldier was trying to tear off Lancaster's buckskin shirt, for he well knew the flow of blood could come from but two wounds, one of them fatal; and he prayed mightily and impiously meanwhile.

"Why the devil won't it loose!" he raged, as the strings grew knotted in a tangle. "God of love and mercy, save the lad!" he implored wildly. "By all the fiends of hell, this is damnable! Killed by his own friends," he cried despairingly. "O Lord, Lord! Christ of the thorns and spear-wound, save him!" and tears ran over his rugged face. They two had been constantly together during the long weeks of imprisonment; and Helm, who was a tender-hearted creature of

impulse, had taken Lancaster to his heart like a younger, dearly loved brother.

"Can he be dead?" asked an awed voice.

Supreme emotion prevented Helm from feeling any surprise at the appearance of a girl at such a time, in such a place, as astonishing other-while as the bright presence in the burning bush; for in the fierce excitement of the night he had completely forgotten her. Nor did her coming now recall her to his mind, so deep was his distress. He did not give her a thought, only so far as she might be of use to Lancaster.

Helm thrust his hand under Robert's shirt, blackened with powder and stained with blood, and said, —

"No; thank God! his heart beats yet."

Ferriby approached and leaned over Lancaster, and without more ado Helm snatched from her head the kerchief she had tied about it, dipped it into a swabbing bucket, and clapped it over the wound, which he had laid bare,—a tiny, clean, red spot, perilously near the top of the lung.

"Girl, run for the surgeon!"

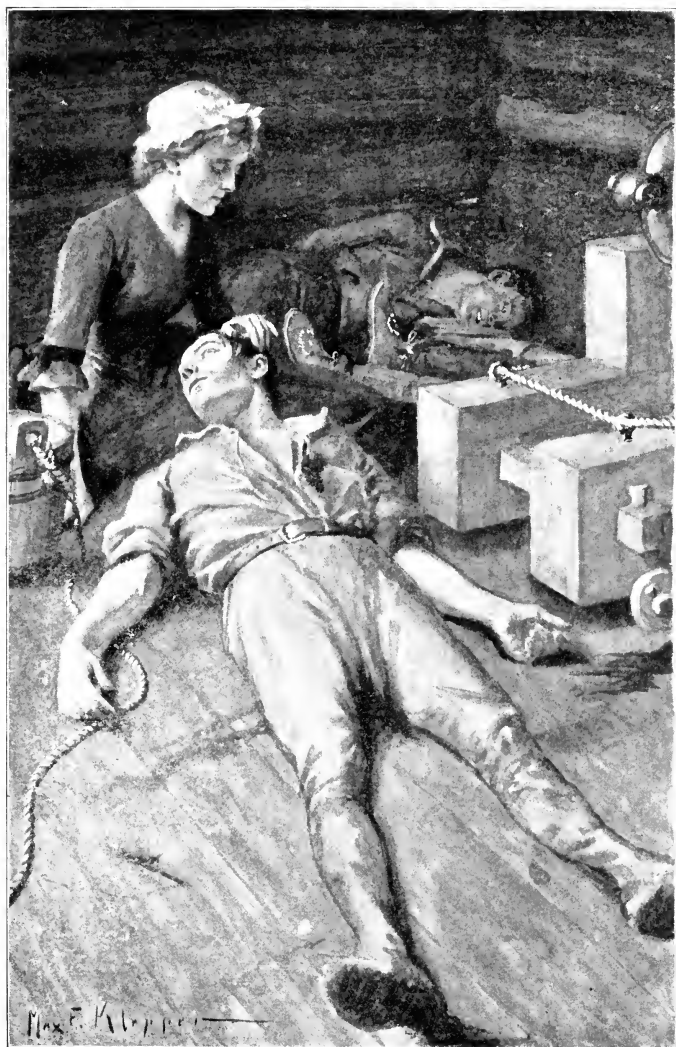
"I don't know him when I see him," Ferriby replied timidly, afraid of Helm in his present mood, fierce with grief.

"Take my place!" he ordered.

She sat down upon the floor, and he laid the heavy head, rocking like a dead man's in the transfer, on her lap. He flung himself down the ladder, leaving her with the forgotten dead, and—as both feared—with the dying. Lancaster's long black hair fell over his face, the ends on one side dribbling with blood. His countenance was blackened with powder smoke, except for a narrow curve on the forehead, where his cap, now fallen off, had rested. Its youthful contours were sharpened by months of grief and hardship. His cheeks and lip were covered with a dark beard of a few day's growth. His eyes were closed, which was the one hopeful sign that made her think him living. She unloosed the kerchief from about his neck, dipped it into the water and passed it gently over his face and removed the grime. Her task done, she looked into the pale countenance to read what it might reveal. Trembling seized her hand which drew back the long black hair, shudders shook her flesh, her heart swelled to bursting in her breast. She struggled to hold back the wild shriek which must not be uttered.

“Can it be—O God! can it be?” she moaned.

His heavy lids raised. He looked dully into



“ She gently wiped his face, and kissed him once on the lips.”

the agonized eyes above him, whose strong, imploring gaze had drawn back his departing soul into his dull orbs. He gasped slowly, in scarcely audible tones:—

“Am—I—dead? Is—it—is—it—my Ferriby? or—is—it—her—ministering spirit?” A rapture of wonder brightened his eyes for an instant. He almost screamed the last words, for fever was mounting to his brain.

Her joy was as keen as anguish. Its fervor dried up the springs from whence the tears of less poignant emotions flow. She felt as if dying for very gladness, and that she *must* die of very grief. But if a sob had saved her, she dared not give it vent; she must bear all the meeting had brought, or might bring, in silence. For her lover, so near to death, must be spared the strain of everything, whether of grief or of joy.

She gently wiped his face, and kissed him once softly on his lips. His eyes lifted again. “It is my Ferriby! No other kiss could be so sweet!” And with a sigh he seemed to sleep.

CHAPTER XXXVII

UNDER THE WHITE FLAG

As the truce bearer approached nearer the gate, a calm fell upon the fort more impressive than the clangor of arms or the roar of cannon. The heavy sulphurous smoke was weighed earthward by the mist from the sullen river.

Hamilton, with his aide, Hay, had retired to his own quarters to receive Clark's messenger with due impressiveness. His face was flushed with gratification, and he turned to Hay and said with boastful elation:—

“The insolent varlets! It takes but a taste of true soldiership to subdue them.”

“Yes, general. No doubt they see the noose before them and would make terms,—the dastards!—to keep their heels from dangling.”

They looked arrogant with victory.

The heavy puncheon gate was thrown wide with a triumphant flourish, and Clark's orderly entered. He was ushered into the presence of Hamilton and Hay and saluted respectfully.

There was an affronting pause. Could contempt kill, the orderly had been a dead man, so disdainful were the looks the two British officers bent upon him.

Wholly unmoved, he asked with a courteous inclination, —

“I have the honor to speak to General Hamilton?”

Hamilton, who disdained to speak, nodded a curt affirmative.

“I am Captain Nicholas Cardinal, at your service; and I have the honor to deliver to you Colonel Clark’s message, and am commissioned to bear to him your reply, if it please you.”

Hamilton cavalierly accepted the note he tendered, carelessly opened it, and began to read. After the perusal of the first few lines his manner turned from haughty contempt to furious anger. His eyes flashed. His lips worked. He muttered fiercely beneath his breath. The cool audacity of the message made him raging mad, so widely at variance was it from what he had expected, — *humble surrender*. What he read was this: —

“SIR: — In order to save yourself from the impending storm that now threatens you, I order you immediately to surrender yourself, with all

your garrison, stores, &c., &c. For if I am obliged to storm you, you may depend on such treatment as is justly due a murderer. Beware of destroying stores of any kind, or any papers or letters that are in your possession, or hurting one house in town, for, by heaven! if you do, there shall be no mercy shown you.

G. R. CLARK."¹

The unparalleled arrogance, the matchless effrontery, the impudent confidence — the antithesis of his anticipation — struck Hamilton dumb. But he recovered his wits and dashed off these words, —

“Lieutenant-governor Hamilton begs leave to acquaint Colonel Clark that he and his garrison are not disposed to be awed into any action unworthy of British subjects.”

Cardinal, surmising its tenor, accepted the note composedly, and retired with strict military courtesy.

Hamilton looked for an immediate reply, but got none, nor did Clark make any demonstration whatever. The suspense was unbearable, and after enduring it for two or three hours Hamilton himself sent the white flag to the Virginia colonel.

¹ Bowman's "Journal." Original letters in Draper Coll. Wisc. Hist. Society.

His aide bore a letter asking for a truce of three days and for a private conference between himself and Clark within the fort, each to have one witness. He ended the document by saying, "If Colonel Clark makes a difficulty of coming into the fort, Lieutenant-governor Hamilton will speak to him by the gate."

Clark was surprised at the character of this missive; and while he suspected there was some secret motive for it, he was not slow to reply, and his note was decisive:—

"If Mr. Hamilton is desirous of a conference with Colonel Clark, he will meet him at the church with Captain Helm."

Clark and his officers were discussing this strange turn of affairs, not without a tinge of suspicion, as the messenger walked off to the fort, when a wild war-cry sounded from the hills back of the village, and a band of savages in war-paint and feathers appeared upon the lower terrace, returning from a successful foray, driving before them their wretched captives. From their belts dangled the blood-sodden scalps of men, women, and children. A crack of musketry followed the war-cry, a salute to the British flag, hanging limp above the fort like a thing sentient of disaster. They descended to the broad level

on which the town stood, and not until then were they aware of the presence of the Americans. They turned in panic and fled to the forest behind them. Clark immediately ordered a squad to pursue them.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

A SUSPENSION OF HOSTILITIES

SHORTLY after noon Clark, accompanied by Bowman, entered the little slab church. He much mistrusted whether his arrogant demand would be complied with; but he had scarcely had time to become impatient when Hamilton appeared, accompanied not only by Helm, but Major Hay as well. Perhaps no more momentous conference ever took place, one more fruitful of results, than this which was held in the little slab church that gloomy February day. On it followed the cession of the great Illinois country to Virginia, all owing to the tremendous courage and fidelity of Clark and his little army of 130 men. The success of the colonies was not yet assured, but Clark proceeded as if it were an accomplished fact.

When the English general faced Clark, he could not but forebode the end of British rule. This man and his puny army had forced their way through insuperable obstacles; fifteen days had they marched on a journey which ordinarily

required three, through bottomless mud and unremitting rain; six days wading to their necks or floating on improvised rafts over the Drowned Lands, where the Ouibache spread six miles in an angry flood. Without food six days; with but four hours' rest after this tremendous exertion, to commence an assault, — could such men be conquered? Hamilton could not but feel humiliated in the presence of this wet, mud-splashed giant, who, when other men would have been foot-sore and weary and discouraged, defied the king as sturdily as if he had had at his back a great army instead of a puny company of 130 backwoodsmen.

The conference began at once by Hamilton's producing written terms of capitulation.

Clark gave these articles deliberate perusal while Hamilton watched his countenance for sign of assent.

"I reject it as a whole!" said Clark, equably.

"Sir, may I beg you to make some proposition?" asked Hamilton, no little disturbed by his calm, unqualified refusal.

"I have no other to make, than that already submitted — your surrender as prisoners at discretion."

Hamilton flushed hotly and began a protest

which Clark silenced by a wave of the hand, and resumed his interrupted speech.

“Your troops have behaved with spirit, and you cannot suppose they will be worse treated in consequence of it, viewing us as savages, as they have been taught to do —”

Hamilton would have interposed a word, but was again denied speech, while Clark dispassionately proceeded:—

“It is vain to make any proposition to me. By this time you must be sensible the garrison will fall. Both of us must view all blood spilled in the future as murder. My troops are already impatient and call aloud for permission to tear down and storm the fort. If such a step be taken, many of course will be cut down, and the result of an enraged body of backwoodsmen breaking in would be obvious to you.”

Clark paused, that his hearers might fully grasp his meaning, and realize his implacable determination, and all that hung on Hamilton's own decision. Then he resumed with slow impressiveness, “It would be out of the power of an American officer to save a single man!”

For an instant they gazed at Clark dumbly. A purple color suffused Hamilton's face, he thrice attempted to speak before he burst out furiously.

“For this cursed defiance of the king you may yet pay dearly, sir! For the present I am hard beset. But a time of reckoning will come, when this rebel war is put down. Then, sir, you will meet the fate of all traitors!”

Clark bowed with the utmost civility, and said coolly:—

“It is my decision. If you choose to comply, perhaps the sooner the better.”

Helm, always easily moved, was pricked by the soldier's shame on Hamilton's face, and interposed with swift kindness,—

“Cannot you moderate your demands, colonel?”

“Captain Helm,” answered Clark, with the severity of a superior toward an offending inferior, “I would remind you, sir, that you are a British prisoner! As such, it is doubtful if you may with propriety speak on the subject!”

This rebuff Helm received with a crestfallen air, while mentally admiring the inflexible attitude of his chief.

Hamilton, perceiving a chance for help, quickly said, turning to his prisoner,—

“Captain Helm is from this moment liberated, and may use his pleasure!”

Clark sternly regarded Helm: “I will not receive you on such terms. You must return to the

garrison, a prisoner, as you came, and await your fate." Amazed at his stern obduracy, Helm had no boldness left to make reply.

Turning fully to Hamilton, Clark directed his speech to him, ignoring the others. Unseen, Helm, the irrepressible, made a grimace at Bowman, who had been respectfully silent during the entire interview, and who with difficulty commanded his countenance at the sly impertinence of his brother-at-arms that could not be overawed for long by any one.

Clark addressed Hamilton with the calm decision of finality, and the Englishman was troubled and mortified beyond measure. "Sir," the American said, "hostilities shall not commence until fifteen minutes after the drums sound the alarm."

Saluting conventionally, the two parties moved off a few paces,—one to return to the fort, the other to the rude breastworks. Hamilton turned about and asked Clark irritatedly, but with rather more deference than he had hitherto shown, —

"Will you be so kind, sir, as to give me reasons for refusing the garrison on any other terms than those I have offered?"

Clark mused a moment, then answered unflinchingly:—

"I have no objections to giving my real reasons,

which are simply these: I know that the greater part of the Indian partisans are with you. *I want an excuse to put them to death*, or otherwise treat them as I think proper. The cries of the widows and the fatherless on the frontiers, which they have occasioned, now require *their* blood from *my* hands." He paused to note the effect.

The dispassionate decision, the inflexible purpose, conveyed by his scarcely lifted voice, fell like a clammy coldness on them, that chill which tells of death.

His own officers, Helm and Bowman, stared at him incredulous, and Hamilton and Hay were moved from their military comport.

Fully alive to the impression he had made, Clark continued:—

"I do not choose to be so timorous as to obey the absolute command of their authority. I would rather lose fifty men than not empower myself to execute this piece of business with propriety. If you choose to risk the massacre of your garrison for their sakes—it is at your pleasure. I might, perhaps, take it into my head to send for some of those widows to see it executed."

He bent on them a look of such scathing rebuke, such terrible vengefulness, that for an instant they quailed.

Major Hay, who had listened closely, with a countenance of dismay, burst out insolently, —

“Pray, sir, who is it you call ‘Indian partisans’?”

“Sir, I take Major Hay to be one of the principals!” replied Clark, urbanely, as if passing an idle compliment.

A greenish paleness passed over Hay’s countenance; his limbs trembled so they could hardly bear him up. Hamilton, seeing him in such sad plight, blushed for very shame. Bowman looked first at Hay with disdain, then on Hamilton with respectful sympathy, while Clark remained utterly unmoved.

As they stood thus, like men under doom, a shout from the returning American squad was heard, and without another word Clark walked hastily off to his intrenchments.

Hamilton and Hay, with Helm still in attendance, retraced the few rods to the fort, to await the beat of the drum.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE END OF AH-MAH-NAC-O

THE return of the squad with their captives threw the fort and town into violent excitement. The French villagers had retired behind barred doors and windows, as ordered by Clark, before hostilities had begun, and up to this time—two hours past noon—had remained close in their houses. But now wooden shutters were parted a crack, barred doors opened a tiny space, and eager faces were pressed against them.

The villagers supposed the shouting mob to be one of Hamilton's war-parties, sent out against the pioneers, returning victorious, and with deep anxiety they awaited events.

Within the fort the spirits of the English were at the lowest ebb, which the gloom of the day did not tend to mitigate. They augured ill from the disturbed countenances of Hamilton and Hay. From the blockhouses they watched the Americans drive before them the defiant savages into the very presence of Clark. He was intrenched

but thirty yards from the front gate, and the wind bore his sonorous voice to their ears. Now and then a chance word reached them, from which, and his significant actions, they could gather his intention.

When the captives were brought face to face with Clark, he gave them one brief glance. His determination was already taken, and his orders were short and stern.

To the officer in command of the squad he said, —

“These five Indians are to be executed, even as they have killed their victims, — by the tomahawk, before the big gate at the fort, at once.”

Bowman looked as if he would have remonstrated. Clark, reading his intention, said sagely and coolly, —

“It may convince the Indians generally that Governor Hamilton cannot give them that protection which he has made them believe he can.”

The savages gathered their fate from the stern countenance of the “Big Knife,” and accepted it stoically.

They were led to the place designated. Profound silence prevailed as the names of the men detailed for the execution were called. They stepped forward with firmly set lips and stern

eyes; there was not one among them who could not tell a fearful tale of cruelty toward his kinsmen.

The prisoners squatted on the ground, and all but one threw their blankets over their heads, ready to finish life bravely. That one, frightfully smeared and stained, turned imploring eyes to the guard nearest him and broke into agonized appeal, as the man raised his hatchet to brain him.

"Oh, save me! save me!" he screamed.

The executioner turned pale, his weapon fell. He rushed to the spot where Clark stood and cried piteously: —

"Oh, sir, spare him. He is a spy, but he is my unhappy son. The hope of my old age. Be merciful!"

Clark was not unmoved by this woful appeal; but it alone would not have saved the wretch. He had a whole village of wavering Frenchmen to deal with. The condemned man was one of them, though an English partisan. The suppliant, his father, had labored all night in the intrenchments. Mercy in this case would bind the easily moved Frenchmen to his cause; and Clark ordered the prisoner released.

"For your sake, and because of the service his brave countrymen have rendered us this day, he is free. But send him from the village."

The Indians had uncovered and watched this scene with faces as impassive as red stone images. It only strengthened their purpose to die bravely. Clark signed for the business to proceed, and then withdrew.

The savages again swathed themselves in their blankets, and the first one chanted a weird death song:—

“O Great Spirit, I go toward the sun-setting, beyond which lie the Happy Hunting grounds. O Manitou of my Fathers, when I come to the Happy Hunting Grounds make me fleetier than the doe, braver than the panther, wiser than the fox. There I shall feel no more the keen frosts of winter. There hunger will gnaw me no more. There the sword-leaved maize grows green and fresh forever. On those wide plains the buffalo are numberless, and the deer cannot be counted. There the sun shines warm, nor ever hides behind a cloud. There the Pale Face comes not. There I shall be forever strong and forever young. I go joyfully! I go bravely! I am ready!” He dropped into silence. Crash! The hatchet fell—the scalping-knife flashed! The body sank backward easily.

Unmoved, the second warrior began his death song. It ended. Crash! The second skull was split.

Without faltering the third warrior broke into his dirge, and met the grisly terror calmly as the last note died upon his lips.

But one remained alive, a stripling with the proud bearing of the best of his race, and with the cruelty of the most brutal. He threw off the end of the blanket and faced his executioner uncovered. No death song was on his lips, mocking malice parted them in a hideous, smiling grimace. Wolfish hate gleamed from his steady eye. Had his executioner approached near enough, his gleaming teeth would have shredded his flesh. Whether his contemptuous defiance, or whether the silent appeal of youth for continued life unnerved the arm that directed it, the blow was not strong enough; it did not kill. Ah-mah-nac-o himself tore the hatchet from the gaping cleft in his skull and handed it back to the man. Twice, thrice it fell before its work was accomplished. Hardened men turned away from the ghastly sight, sickened.

Above in the blockhouse Ferriby sat with the head of her wounded lover pressed against her breast; and neither knew that they had been avenged, — horribly, brutally. Another moment and the dead, with great splashing, were thrown into the Ouibache, whose muddy waters received

and hid them, and whose mournful voice in low cadence echoed their death song.

Behind the peepholes of Fort Sackville many a heart contracted with fear and dread. Never before had they beheld such atrocities; *they had only sanctioned them ! instigated them ! rewarded them !* Their ears were terror-struck by the crash of the tomahawk. Their eyes widened with horror at the glistening circle described by the scalping-knife. They were appalled by the hideous spectacle enacted before them, *not upon them*. Yet *they* beheld, *not torture*, but swift death.

They might well tremble behind the frail barriers of the fort at this tame repetition of the atrocities of their own mercenaries. The example was as efficacious as Clark had surmised it would be. By set of sun, which went down dully in dark skies, Hamilton sent a messenger bearing a note of surrender.

CHAPTER XL

“A HAPPY ISSUE OUT OF ALL THEIR TROUBLE”

FOR the second time in less than a twelve-month Sackville became an American fort; from its flagstaff floated the colors of the United Colonies; the bars in the square of blue—reminder of the British—had been eliminated, and the azure field was sown with thirteen bright, symbolic stars.

The slow days of spring had been days of suspense to Ferriby, for Robert, enfeebled by all he had endured, had come near to death; that chance bullet had made an almost fatal climax to their tribulations.

On a bright, soft day in April, nearly a year after the parting in the clearing, Robert and Ferriby were seated on a circular bench around the large tree at the bottom of Madame Dubois's garden. The flower-beds were only oblongs of rich dark mould, through which now and then crocuses flashed gleams of purple, white, and

yellow. The nascent foliage of the lilacs was no larger than the ears of the field-mice disporting themselves among its succulent shoots. The buds of the fruit trees were yet folded in tight little black cones. But the sunlight was blindingly brilliant, as only spring sunshine, untempered by leafage, can be. The southern breeze was bland and scented, and slipped by them with the silky smoothness of a web of gossamer. Spring, like an affable young queen, with her myriad heralding voices, called every one forth to behold her succession to sovereignty over the realm of nature.

Robert and Ferriby sat side by side, hand clasped in hand. A tenderer love was theirs, chastened by sorrow and separation. Now there were no playful bickerings, no mock quarrels, no dissimulation.

For the past weeks her part had been the devoted ministry of a betrothed wife; his, the grateful acceptance of that service as his most sacred right. Together they had gone within sight of the Valley of the Shadow, and Providence had turned them back. They were talking over again, as they had many, many times, the hardships and calamities of the past months.

"When I think of it all, Ferriby, it does not

seem too great a price to have paid, — to find you at last!" said Robert.

She gently raised his pallid hand to her lips, with eyes tender, but unmoistened. Grief had long since dried up the fountain of her tears, and joy could not set it a-flow again.

"None but you, Robert, could be all in all to me as you are now. It seems as if all the love I had for father, Granny, and little Jack were yours, besides that other, sweeter, different love. I have no one now but you!"

They sat silent for a moment, then Robert said gently, "In our new home in dear old Virginia, love, you will be able to overcome the horror of these months, and be happy again."

"Yes, dear Robert, I will be happy; but can I ever forget?"

She fell into deep, sad revery and seemed lost even to his presence. Her eyes stared straight before her, as if in spiritual vision she saw that which could never fade away. He spoke one word, and she roused herself and asked with solicitous tenderness:—

"Do you feel that you can endure the weariness of the long, long journey to Virginia, Robert? The voyage by water will be easy enough, but the rough miles of the trail through the wilderness

and over the mountains, — have you strength to bear the fatigue of those?"

"Yes, my girl, anything, with you to bear me company!"

As they talked thus, Jeanne issued from the rear hall door, and had hardly trod a dozen steps of the path to the garden when St. Vrain, no longer a coureur, turned the corner of the house, and quickly overtook her.

"A most fortunate encounter, Ma'm'selle Jeanne," he said cheerfully, as they continued onward together down the long walk, overlaid with dull-hued sod, through which the bright green spikelets were springing, that led to the distant garden seat.

Jeanne tried to hurry from him, but he kept close at her side and boldly took her hand and stayed her flight, — for flight it was that she meditated. She had come to dread St. Vrain, for he would intrude his spiritual presence into her prayers and his bodily presence into her path ever since the February day when Hamilton had surrendered the fort to Clark. For Hilaire had spent the remainder of the winter at O Poste, and he had sorely unsettled her purpose and peace of mind.

"Ma'm'selle, those two are happy. Yes!" he

said, pointing to the distant tree, from one side of which the folds of a woman's gown showed. "Why disturb them? Make me happy instead! It is scarcely nine o'clock, and the notary and Father Gibault will not be here till ten; for I am their express. Walk with me in the garden a little apart from them. A garden, m'amie, was ever a favorite spot with man. There he first worshipped, ma'm'selle, there he first loved. Ma foi! since the ancient paradise, no fitter place for love-making, as those two well know," and he nodded toward the tree behind which Robert and Ferriby sat.

"Monsieur, I am sent with a message from maman to Angèle, and cannot walk with you," faltered Jeanne, as she tried to pull away from his clasping hand.

"Ah! I, too, have seen madame mère. She, my Jeanne, loves Hilaire well." Jeanne started and looked quickly up at him.

"Yes, it is true. And what do you think m'amie, she is quite willing —"

But Jeanne, panic-stricken, jerked away from him and ran swiftly down the path. In three great bounds St. Vrain overtook her, and without more ado clasped her tight with one arm, his eyes bright with laughter and mischief. With

not so much as "by your leave" he noisily kissed her quivering lips. She looked at him frightened and trembling.

"Don't look like that, m'amie, or Hilaire will think you do not love him, and be most miserable. For you do love me? Yes, I think so!" and he smiled triumphantly.

"I love the church. I would devote heart and soul —"

"To me! Is it not so?"

"No! no!"

"Yes! yes! I would never rail against your devotions, my Jeanne. No! All the petitions you can put up for St. Vrain would not make him good enough for this saintly little fillette," laying his hand gently on her shoulder. "But, by le bon Dieu, Jeanne, if you do not love me and be my little wife, the lost soul of Hilaire will be laid to your account."

He looked so sincerely earnest that Jeanne quailed at the awful responsibility he designedly thrust upon her, trusting to her innocence not to detect his sophistry.

"Yes, ma foi! none but you can guide me back into the church again. No prayers but yours can lead me to salvation and the cleansing of my soul, my fair saint."

"But, monsieur, I can pray for you in the cloister. Your journey to France—so far—I cannot part—"

"No need, m'amie, for I only go to France to establish my claim to the debt-ridden remnant of my father's estate, and the title. Little is there left but the title, for me. Then I return here and join the forces of the Marquis de La Fayette." Jeanne showed surprise. "Yes," he continued, "I belong to this new world, heart and soul. And, *s'il plait à Dieu*, I may not serve my rightful king here, I'll serve no other! I too will be an American; and that new flag I will make mine, even as it is yours, mignonne. All can see by now, that victory lies with the colonies. Independence will come sooner or later. It is destiny!" And he looked toward the fort where the colors streamed broad and free in the balmy south wind.

For an instant St. Vrain was serious and silent. The venturesome bees droned in the bursting daffodils and jonquils, grumbling at their lack of heart-sweetness; the river murmured gently; and the soft modulations of the distant lovers' voices came like honeyed whispers on the air. St. Vrain smiled as he caught the uncertain tones.

"Jeanne, it will take but the one little word 'yes' to lead us into their paradise. Say it,

mignonne, say it to your Hilaire!" he pleaded coaxingly.

"Oh, Hilaire, will it not be a sin? My vows —"

"Have never been taken — no, not so much as a novice's — and are not vows at all, — only the very common mistake of a tender, pious fillette, whose pure heart was meant to be the sanctuary of a sinful man who needs all the love it can give him, for the good of his soul — and himself," he added mentally. "Come! say 'yes'! and we will go together and give those two our messages, which are much the same, no doubt — that the fleet will set off for La Belle Rivière a little after noon with the British prisoners; and that 'Sieur Vigo and Père Gibault will be here in an hour to be present at their marriage."

"Yes," said Jeanne, assenting to his conjecture about the similarity of their messages. But St. Vrain stubbornly took it to mean another thing and would not be convinced he was wrong.

Again a fleet of batteaux lay under the palisades of the fort on the stately Ouibache. Again was heard the warning note of the assembly, and then two long files of men issued from the fort gate, with drums braced and colors flying.

Between them walked the British prisoners in twos, manacled. Clark, supported by Helm, marched at the head of the column, and bore himself with his accustomed stateliness. No look of proud elation mortified further the chagrined Hamilton, who, with Hay for a companion, now walked a prisoner to the river where a few weeks before he had landed with the arrogant self-sufficiency of a conqueror. Behind him came the six or eight subalterns and eighteen common soldiers who were to bear him company on the long, hard journey into Virginia, and to share his imprisonment. "The Hair-buyer general" bent his eyes on the ground, but Hay cast many a sullen look at the vivacious crowd gathered to see them off.

Hardly had the prisoners been disposed on the boats than a loud, cheery hum of voices, mingled with laughter, was heard. All eyes intently scanned the throng coming down the lane from Colonel Dubois's. The haut ton of the village had turned out to speed the newly married pair, Robert and Ferriby, who had only been made man and wife that morning by the notary. Colonel Clark had given them convoy, with the prisoners, on the long journey to Robert's far-away home in the old colony. It

was in some sort a bridal procession. St. Vrain, who had long since made friends with Robert, and had forgiven him the blow that nearly cracked his bones, supported the groom, and chaffed at and jested with him ceaselessly. Ferriby walked between Madame and Jeanne, and their tears flowed freely while tender words of parting fell from their lips. Monsieur and Suzanne followed close behind them, the girl now laughing and teasing, now sobbing bitterly. Élise was completely absorbed in the softly spoken speeches which Lieutenant Bowman was pouring into her willing ears.

The villagers considerably trooped at a little distance behind, old Madame Taché telling her mate over and over the story of Angèle's rescue, her own share growing a little at each repetition.

'Sieur Vigo and Père Gibault paced sedately at the rear of the gay procession. The good father was so vitally human and tender that the loves of the young appealed strongly to him. He had pronounced falteringly the nuptial benediction over Robert and Ferriby at the conclusion of the contract before the notary; and afterwards whispered privately words of blessing to Jeanne, upon St. Vrain's triumphant announcement of their betrothal, with the full con-

sent of Monsieur and Madame Dubois. For her comforting he had said beneficently, —

“It may be for the salvation of a noble but flighty soul, my Jeanne, that the good God hath ordered it other than you had designed.”

“How strangely destiny leads us, maybe all unwilling, to the fulfilment of her plans!”

“How surely *le bon Dieu* guides us by his Providence, you mean, my good friend!” corrected the priest, mildly. “In his own good time he unfolded this mystery which surrounded the maid Angèle, and brought it to a happy issue at last. He has made us all his instruments, — for even the good God does not work in this world without instruments, — to forward his mighty purpose, the end of which we see not yet.”

Robert approached Clark, who clasped his hand strongly, and after a few words of warm congratulation said: —

“Remember, lad, our common country has need of her men, young, sturdy, and fearless like you. There is work for you to do yet in the Illinois country; and when you see your way to return, I, too, have need of you.”

Tears and embraces there were in plenty. Danger beset the long way: for they would not arrive at the end of their journey before mid-

summer. A gun boomed from the fort, the signal of departure. All made haste to embark. Robert and Ferriby found place in the last batteau and in another moment were floating southward toward La Belle Rivière, bound, at last, for home in the fair colony of Virginia.

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